The Master Hope

Phyllis Bottome

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THE MASTER HOPE

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BY

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

AUTHOR OF "LIFE THE INTERPRETER"

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Dedication

TO WILMETT, IN HOPE AND LOVE

❧

"Ah! if indeed there be
Beyond one darksome door, a secret stair
Which winding to the battlements, shall lead
Hence to pure light, free air,
This is the master hope, or the supreme despair!"

—WILLIAM WATSON

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THE MASTER HOPE.

CHAPTER I.

"Thou canst not choose Freedom and go in bondage to the delight of life."—RUDYARD KIPLING

IT was Daphne's last day in London. She wondered as she looked out over the sunny gardens, with their new birth of green leaves and neatly ordered flowers, why the country should take possession of her, and if the riches it gave would really compensate for the riches she must lose.

If it had been a little later in the season, and she had not been in mourning, perhaps she would not have wondered at this. It is only when we cannot do what we want, that what we can do becomes such a drudgery.

Daphne anticipated nothing but the uncongenial, so she sat fretting at fate and wondering what to do with the hours left her. Beyond the wish to avoid her stepmother, whose somewhat hasty re-marriage had caused her flight, she had no settled plan. She had just decided to ring for a maid and go out into the gardens, when she was startled by the announcement of Lord Cheston, who came in apologetic and a little shy to find out, as he expressed it, "What she was up to?"

"I have a day of last moments before me," she explained, "without even a luggage label to write: and I *don't* want to leave London, Reggie, isn't it awful?" Reggie looked as if he thought it was very awful indeed and shook his head at the hopelessness of the prospect.

"You could stay on, you know," he finally brought out, "couldn't you?"

"With Vera—and a new husband, a young man with a moustache!" cried Daphne impatiently. "And to hear him called my stepfather once removed! It's an impossible situation. You might as well suggest that I should go to an orphan asylum, or become a foundling!"

"Do you object to moustaches?" asked Reggie, seizing the only subject on which he felt himself competent to speak. "I do, myself, you know. I always think they hide a fellow's mouth."

"That's their one advantage," said Daphne with some bitterness, "they hide his! If we stay here much longer Vera will come in; can't you think of something to do?" Reggie's face expressed the terrible struggle that the importance of such a subject suggested. He was perfectly content where he was, and so unused to projects which included Daphne, and so unwilling to include projects that didn't, that it was she who had finally to help him out. "Have you ever seen the Tower?" she said. "I haven't. We might go on the top of a 'bus, and walk about in the city. I have never walked about in the city; have you?"

"Rather," said Reggie with pride, "my lawyer's office is in the city. I've been there heaps of times."

"Jews are there, too," said Daphne with painful emphasis. Reggie looked crestfallen.

"What I say is," he ventured feebly, "there isn't any real harm in Jews."

"I daresay you are competent to judge," said Daphne a little grimly. There was a pause.

"We can't go alone, can we?" Reggie asked doubtfully.

Daphne, who had just decided that they couldn't, regarded him with unmixed scorn.

"I should very much like to know why not?" she said with some dignity. "I am quite able to judge of such matters for myself."

"Oh! all right," said Reggie delightedly. "Go and put your things on, and I'll square Vera if she comes in."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," said Daphne as she left the room, "by squaring Vera!" Reggie, left alone, chuckled. Vera, it seemed, was closeted with her housekeeper, and would not need squaring. In a few moments, his companion descended with the addition of a large rose-covered hat, a well-fitting jacket, and an admirably handsome and useless feather boa. Daphne asked him if her hat was on quite straight. It was a superfluous question, as the room was well supplied with mirrors, but it gave him a valuable opportunity of surveying the whole effect from every possible point of view. "There's nothing wrong, is there?" she pleaded anxiously

"It's fairly decent," said Reggie contentedly, "only it hides your face a little."

"It's meant to do that," Daphne informed him.

"Well, then, I don't approve of its intentions," said Reggie. "They're a bit too shady." This obvious pun having met with the scorn it deserved, the two descended, and stood for a blissful moment surveying the bright, sweet freshness of the morning, which seemed expressly created for their benefit. Their youth laid claim to every breath of spring. They wandered through the Gardens to the Park, reaching the verge of Piccadilly at about twelve. Time, however, meaning nothing to them, they continued their journey, while Reggie explained to her from the front seat of a 'bus all the places that he didn't know along their route, and she contradicted him in equally happy ignorance. The foolish moments gathered an extra force, until at last when they had reached their destination and passed in due form through the historical associations, which seemed so very far away, they were confronted by an obviously absurd clock which asserted that it was half-past one! When they found that both their watches were under the same delusion, Daphne became alarmed.

"What on earth *shall* we do, Reggie?" she said; "you ought to have been more careful!" He met her reproach with a rueful sigh. "Can't you think of anything?" she demanded indignantly.

"I can think of lunch," he ventured. "I could think quite a lot about lunch."

"We oughtn't to," said Daphne hesitating.

"Well, that settles it," said Reggie; "besides," he added solemnly, "I have known you since you were five years old. And you scratched me. It is one of my earliest memories."

"Well, I don't wonder!" said Daphne crossly; "but I don't see that has anything to do with it—anybody would have scratched you!"

"Armed with the days of our infancy," Reggie assured her, "why shouldn't we share chops, particularly if they are grilled? I grant you it would be improper if they were fried. I know an awfully good place, too." That decided her. Daphne could not refuse what sounded so eminently satisfactory; besides, it was really great fun, and Reggie was only a boy. She always considered him a boy, though, as a matter of fact, he was her senior by three years.

"I don't know how you came to know of such a good place," she said to him suspiciously as she finished her beautifully grilled cutlet. "I suppose you lunched here with your lawyer?" Reggie looked a little put out.

"I don't see why you should always drag him in," he said, "just when I was enjoying myself, too."

"Well, you mustn't any more," said Daphne. "It's time we went home, and if we meet anybody I shall never forgive you."

"The principle is the same," said Reggie sternly, "if we don't."

"How absurd you are, Reggie. We aren't doing any harm, are we?"

"I'm not, certainly," said Reggie; "but I can't answer for you."

"Well, if we aren't doing any harm," Daphne went on, ignoring his remark, "it can't be wrong, but if people see us and think it's wrong, it *will* be, you must see that. We are told to avoid the very appearance——"

"Of evil," Reggie finished; "you are, that's where that hat comes in, it imputes a bad motive to the whole proceeding. You'd better not take it into the vicarage, your uncle would want to reform it."

"Oh! do you think he'll reform me?" cried Daphne aghast. Reggie chuckled.

"I daresay he'll *try*," he said reassuringly, "but I shouldn't be anxious about the *result* if I were you." Daphne tried to frown, but her success was dashed by a dimple which she could not overcome. They went for one more look at the river. The sun caught the sails of the boats and floated with them into the distant mist. The dome of St. Paul's shone like a lighted window, and far off the towers of Westminster shot up to share the glory.

"I shall remember to-day," said Daphne with a little sigh. "Now that I drift off too, into the mist, where shall I land, I wonder, and shall I ever come back? It will be all the same, but I sha'n't be; you know, Reggie. It will be another girl! I hope," her eyes rested on the cathedral in sudden self-searching, "I hope a very much better girl, Reggie."

"Oh! I wouldn't go as far as that," he pleaded, "if I were you!" but his voice was not as steady as he could have wished.

"You don't know," said Daphne in a low, earnest voice, "you don't know what I mean."

"And won't you tell me?" he asked. Daphne shook her head.

"Don't let's be sentimental," she said, "it doesn't suit you nor please me. Now, which is most respectable for us: a 'bus or a hansom?" Reggie looked thoughtful.

"A hansom is nicer in some ways," he concluded, "but a 'bus takes a longer time."

"Then we'll take a hansom," said Daphne decidedly. "I agree with you, that the shorter time is a great advantage."

"Now, who ever said that?" cried the exasperated Reggie, "you're simply unfair!" It was nearly four o'clock, and people had begun to call, before they reached their destination. "I suppose you'll write to a fellow?" Reggie asked as the unnecessarily speedy hansom gave its last jerk and plunge. Daphne shook her head.

"There are so many things to do in the country," she exclaimed as she said "good-bye." He held her hand as long as he dared.

"I say," he said, blushing furiously, "it's been a good day, hasn't it?" Daphne ceased to gibe, her eyes grew tender as they met his. There was no doubt that he was an exceedingly nice boy.

"I told you I wouldn't forget," she said, "and I try not to remember what I haven't enjoyed." She turned swiftly and passed into the house. Even the hat with roses could not hide the friendliness of her eyes.

The last moments were nearly over, but not quite, when she ran up to her room and unlocked an old writing-desk full of letters. The handwriting was strong and full of character, and the letters had been read more than once. She did not re-read them now, she only glanced at the signatures Arthur—Arthur—Arthur. There was almost a monotony in the authorship, yet each had a golden difference to the girl who held them on her lap. She took them all over to the empty grate and set a match to them.

Passion, and faith, and hope were burned to ashes in a few moments.

She sat watching them with hungry eyes. "Now it is all over," she said, knowing that nothing had been changed but the visible, and that even that was not altogether a satisfaction.

She could not alter so lightly what the letters had meant.

The drawback to many destructions is that they destroy so little.

CHAPTER II.

> "To love as others love, and hate a little less."
>
> ERNEST HARTLY COLERIDGE.

"OF course," said Mrs. Fordington, "I am not complaining. If it is Providence (and we can hardly call it anything else) I will say nothing. I must attend to the Mothers' Meeting at Aslington, and there is no necessity for us to go to the station, I have ordered the dog-cart. This means that I shall have to take a fly. I am quite willing to do so, Wilfred, though she is no relation of mine." Her husband smiled gently, he understood all (that if it had not been Providence, she would have said), and he was grateful to Providence.

There are people who are completely managed by a system of catch-words, and though very often we disagree with their meaning, we would not for the world interfere with their result. Mrs. Fordington was one of those persons. She was a very capable woman—that is to say, there were few things she felt she could not manage, and the remainder she managed without the faintest hesitation. "There is nothing," she was fond of saying, "like being quite sure." One did not hear so much of Mr. Fordington. He was a scholar, and there is so little to say about scholars. He was also a deeply spiritual man.

"And when does Daphne come, my dear?" he asked her. Mrs. Fordington told him, and then, finding that she had some minutes to spare, she decided to use them profitably.

"Now, Wilfred," she began, sitting down and drawing on her gloves, "I should like to speak to you seriously about your niece. I have no objection to giving her a home, but there must be no misunderstanding her position here. Your brother John died leaving next to nothing. Yes! I know what you are going to say, my dear—he gave his money to the poor! Very true, and if you will allow me to say so, culpably silly. Had his own daughter no more claim on him than gutter children, and are people in the gutter any more important than people out of it? What," said Mrs. Fordington, "*is* there in the gutter to make people lose their heads over it? John lost his, he spent his own money and Mary's, then after her death, not even his marriage with an exceedingly worldly woman made any difference to his gutter money! *She* burned the candle at the other end. I don't believe in extremes. I have often said, 'Be moderate and you'll be safe! Start a crank and everything goes to swell it.' Where would Daphne be now if it wasn't for you?" The Vicar made no attempt to create a destination for her.

"John knew I should look after her," he said.

"Then," said his wife, "it was about the only sensible thing he did know." Mr. Fordington did not try to defend his brother, not because no defence was possible, but because there was none his wife would understand. When he gave her a real reason, she suspected him of keeping something back.

"Daphne must accommodate herself to her new position," she went on. "She must learn to live as the people of Overham do—the nice people, I mean, of course. There is plenty of work for a well-regulated mind, and if she has not yet regulated hers, I daresay I can help her."

"We must win her heart first," said Mr. Fordington, "before we undertake to influence her mind, and I am not sure that I believe in influencing anyone's mind."

"I wish you had not such a lax way of talking," said his wife with a sigh, "you might be Buddhist!"

"I think I see the cab," said her husband, "I hope you will have a nice time."

"Aslington is a dreadful place," said Mrs. Fordington, "the children look very unhealthy, and most of them are cross-eyed. I cannot understand the neglect with which these women treat their children. I shall speak very plainly indeed. Home is a mere word without a good mother."

"That will come in," said the Vicar, "very nicely."

"Yes," said his wife with pardonable pride, "I have inserted it in the last paragraph."

"Mother! mother! mother!" called a child's voice from the lawn, but Mrs. Fordington was looking over her notes: she did not mean to be unkind, she was only absent-minded.

"Be a good girl, Dora," she said, without looking up, and the cab drove off.

"Oh! father dear," said Dora, coming to the open window, "there was promises for a drive, and mother didn't see me at all, she said 'Be a good girl,' and I are a good girl, already!" She was seven years old, but small and delicate for her age, with eyes like her father's. Dora knew that *his* promises were certain as the sun, but mother forgot her's until the child almost wondered whether promises were as true as things which happened. It is puzzling to find out, that what people say can mean something different and even mean nothing at all, and it is better not to find this out any sooner than can be helped.

"You shall drive to the station with me, to see Cousin Daphne," said her father, "only it seems to me you might have a clean frock on." Dora's face brightened.

"You see," she explained, "I was playing with the chickens, it is a kind of game where you have to creep under the wires, and look for nests, and one hen spluttered dirt all over me, an' I said 'you're a 'orrid old beast,' and don't you fink she was, father?"

"No," said her father, "you came into her nursery and meddled with her toys. If she had pecked your dollie, wouldn't you have been angry?" Dora hesitated.

"Dollie's real," she explained, "eggs is silly things what you eat for breakfasts."

"They are just as real to the hen," her father explained, "as Dollie is to you, and I daresay she would eat Dollie's sawdust for breakfast if she could." Dora grew rather red.

"Only a *little* of Dollie is sawdust," she said; "*most* of her's real!"

"The hen would say just the same about her egg," said her father. "Why did you call her a horrid beast, Dora?"

"That's Jack's name for things," said Dora with some pride; "isn't it a nice name?"

"I think not," said her father. "I should call her an estimable bird if I were you."

"That's a very long name to remember," said Dora thoughtfully. "Oh, Daddy!" she suddenly exclaimed, "do you know that I had a dreadful thought when I was with the hen?"

"What was it?" asked the Vicar gently.

"I thought about the very one that spluttered gravel," said Dora, her sensitive lips trembling, "that it looked rather—rather like mother, father dear.

Wasn't it a very wicked thought?" There was a silence between them. The daffodils were still dancing in the sunlight, but a light April cloud was coming up over the Church tower. The Vicar watched it a moment or two.

"I don't think God would call it that," he said at last, "but it was certainly an undesirable reflection, and, do you know, I don't think I should go into the chicken-yard again, except when Jack feeds them?"

"Is that a punishment, daddy?" she asked with her eyes full of tears. The Vicar shook his head.

"It is a precaution," he said, "and a precaution is a safe thing which prevents dangerous ones happening."

"Like taking off wet shoes and saying 'please' before jam?" Dora enquired.

"Very much like," said her father. "Run and put on something pretty and we will go for our drive if it doesn't rain." Dora looked sadly at the cloud.

"It most always *does* rain when I get a clean frock on and Jack does the windows!" she said with a sigh.

"Then we will make up a new game if it does," said the Vicar. The child ran off happy. "We should not," said Mr. Fordington to himself, "let things make too much difference. An estimable bird," he repeated thoughtfully. Then he began to smile. He smiled very often. It was a great help.

CHAPTER III.

"To have the sense of the Eternal in life is a short flight to the Soul; to have had it is the Soul's vitality."—GEORGE MEREDITH.

THE stillness and sweetness of the April world broke upon Daphne like a discovered continent. The country had been silent to her before. She had passed from house-party to house-party all through the golden summers of her life, and nature had seemed a picturesque setting—a back-ground for well-dressed humanity; she wondered now how she had dared to point out "views" as if they were Academy pictures, and patronize roses by arranging them in vases. She realized, as the bustling Paddington train took her through mile after mile of fields and woods and hills, that nature is an element, not a convenience. They stopped at last at a little wayside station, a spot of flowers and trees; this was her destination, and as she stepped off on to the platform, she caught her breath in a strange sense of loneliness and vastness. She was within hail of nothing that was customary or usual. The bucolic blue-eyed youth who stood in heavy uncertainty over her trunks had nothing of the friendly alertness she expected from porters. As far as she could see there were neither houses nor signs of life. It was a silent world of green, and she had not even her maid to fall back upon! Before she had made up her mind to accost the youth, who evidently expected though he had not asked for her ticket, she was relieved by the sound of wheels, and in a few moments the kindly anxious face of Mr. Fordington was looking down at her.

"I can't doubt that you are Daphne," he said smiling, "because there is no one else to choose from. That is the beauty of country life, it individualizes. Dora, this is your cousin."

"I should choose you anyhow," said Dora, "'cause I like your face." Daphne laughed.

"If that is a country compliment," she said, "it is a very pretty one." The groom and the bucolic boy, who, it seemed, was in charge of the station while the station master was having his tea, bore away the trunks between them. The drive to the vicarage was a silent one, sunset lit up the sky, but the steep hills and cold spring leaves struck Daphne with a sense of cheerless beauty. There seemed something almost stern in the chilly loveliness of her surroundings. There was much that must be explained and considered between her uncle and herself, but Dora's presence gave them an excuse for putting it off. Daphne felt, in the silence that was between them, a sense of friendliness and trust that was grateful to her. She was sure she should be happy with him, and she meant to be different—oh, quite different—from what she had ever been before.

Her uncle watched her thoughtfully. He knew little about her as a young lady, though he had loved her dearly as a child, when he had stayed with his brother on his occasional visits to London. He recognized now that she was what people would call exceedingly pretty, though that struck him as mattering very little, even if it were more obvious than her other qualities. He reflected that his wife had never seen her, and wondered how much she would permit her mind to be regulated by her aunt.

" Emma will probably bring the Vicar of Aslington back to dinner," said her uncle after tea, " to talk over parish matters, and I expect my curate, Mitchell. I thought I would just tell you. He is what they call a high churchman, and your aunt does not quite approve of him."

" And what are you, uncle ? " said Daphne, to whom religion, and especially its various forms, was an interesting topic. Her uncle smiled.

" I don't think I am a party man," he said, " I have never considered my position from that standpoint. To me form is beautiful as an interpreter of Spirit. All that leads one to the height of great realities, humility, and truth, and love, and thanksgiving, are surely doors into the infinite ; and all that helps us to realize them, whether it is in the simplicity of a village church, or the magnificent solemnity of a cathedral, lead us to those doors. Form without Spirit is idolatry, and Spirit without form is very vague for human hearts to accept, so truth is given us in parable, and grace in sacraments."

"I meant something a little more definite than that," said Daphne in a puzzled tone.

"Bread and butter is definite," said her uncle, "but it is bread and butter. You must be content to believe mysteries without explanations, it often seems to me, a refuge of the superficial, to require things to be quite clear. It's a shallow pool you can see the bottom of, and more often than not an unhealthy one."

"I like good music," said Daphne doubtfully.

"So do I," said her uncle, "and I hope you will play to me to-night."

"She is not awake yet," thought her uncle as she went to her room, "and so many things happen when people wake up."

CHAPTER IV.

"How very hard it is to be a Christian! Hard for you and me!"
ROBERT BROWNING.

"NOW, my dear Mr. Ogden," said Mrs. Fordington as they drove home after the Mothers' Meeting, "we shall find that young Mitchell there to-night. A confirmed Ritualist, and a most bad-tempered young man, and rather handsome, which is so dangerous, with a young niece in the house; and I should so like you to take him down a bit. You know my husband—he is too tolerant, far too tolerant—and I can assure you he won't say a word, though he has told me he dislikes incense, and wouldn't know how to put on a chasuble if he tried!"

Mr. Ogden could not quite follow all his neighbour said—the fly jolted rather—but he caught the gist of it. "I will endeavour," he said, "to expose the young man's ignorance."

"No one could do it better, I am sure," said Mrs. Fordington. Mr. Ogden looked a little suspicious. "You have such a penetrating mind," she went on, "and such a grasp of truth."

Mr. Ogden looked as if he had, as if, in fact, he would have closed his hand on truth, grasped it to fragments, and never parted with the pieces. "I will uphold the truth," he assured her, "the Evangelical truth," he added rather hastily, as if it were the only safe brand, and all imitations fraudulent.

Mrs. Fordington felt that the truth would be all right then; nor did either of them think that a truth, not capable of standing firm by itself, might be a shallow, superficial truth, or perhaps not a truth at all, only a plausible imitation.

Daphne wore a beautiful dinner dress. She had a lovely neck and shoulders, even her aunt was surprised—though she was much irritated by her appearance. She herself was dressed in black trimmed with blue, a good deal of blue.

"My dear child," she said, when she had passed her large, hard cheek to Daphne, "we dress very simply here. Let me introduce you to our neighbour, Mr. Ogden, and to my husband's colleague—Mr. Mitchell. I hope you are not tired, dear, after your journey?"

Mr. Mitchell was dark, and undeniably good-looking. He was muscular and athletic, and Daphne also thought he must be quite six foot. He had deep blue eyes that turned almost black when he was angry; at least the young ladies of Overham said so, and they had watched them very carefully.

At Overham the curate's eyes were tremendously important. They backed his sermons wonderfully, and lent force to all his appeals. They even sold pincushions at bazaars, made by other young ladies. There was no end to their general utility, and it is to his credit that he knew nothing at all about them.

Daphne talked to Mr. Ogden till dinner-time. She asked him how to teach at Sunday School. He told her, and found her most intelligent. "Of course there *are* other methods besides mine," he modestly declared.

"But your's are so clear!" said Daphne, "and so interesting, and that's a very unusual combination for Sunday School teaching—isn't it?"

Mr. Ogden found her quite exhilarating to talk to. They went down to dinner. Mrs. Fordington was an economical housekeeper. She gave you plenty to eat, perhaps more than you fancied, but she economized in quality. Sometimes her husband wished it was the other way round, but he never said so. He often frowned when Dora ate no breakfast. Mrs. Fordington frowned too, when she noticed it; but *she* frowned at Dora.

"What kind of a meeting did you have this afternoon, my dear?" asked her husband.

"We really did very well, I think. Twenty women turned up, and were quite attentive. We had tea afterwards. Of course the poor things are sadly ignorant, but at any rate I spoke plainly to them. I tried to make them understand their duties."

"And what are their duties?" asked Daphne innocently.

Her aunt looked annoyed. "When you are a mother, Daphne, you will understand," she said coldly.

"But then, why don't they understand?" Daphne persisted; "they are mothers, aren't they—or they wouldn't—meet?"

"You are quite silly, Daphne; because they are uneducated, ignorant women, of course. Their duties ——" Mrs. Fordington paused. (Daphne felt relieved. The curate really had a sense of humour —he was smiling.) "Their duties," the Vicar's wife repeated, "are to make their homes happy and comfortable, to keep their children healthy and tidy, and to be good examples and kindly companions to their husbands."

"Well, for uneducated, ignorant women, that must be a lot for them to learn," said Daphne smiling. "You must forgive me for asking silly questions, please. It seems so very funny to be in a parish: I don't believe I ever dined with a clergyman before; if I did he was lost somewhere among the others. You must excuse me if I make mistakes."

"Miss Fordington," said Mr. Mitchell quietly, "clergymen are quite like other men, you know."

"Except," said Mr. Ogden, seeing his opportunity, "what we may call those sexless creatures, modern Ritualists."

There was a pause, but before the bomb shell had

had time to go off, or Mr. Mitchell to accept the sudden and sweeping challenge of his adversary, Mr. Fordington gently intervened. He hoped, he said, that Mr. Ogden had not forgotten to make him one of his especial flies.

"I go in for trout fishing," he explained to his niece, "and Ogden goes in for making flies, better than nature, and twice as natural. Of course May is our month, but one ought to get ready in April."

Her uncle landed his fish, and for ten minutes Mr. Ogden talked about flies, but the danger was not over yet.

"I noticed," said Mrs. Fordington, "that when I went to church this morning to do the flowers, it was already open. Was it an oversight, or, if not, may I ask for what reason it can possibly have been open at that hour of the morning?"

The curate looked uncomfortable. The Vicar again intervened. "But if you wanted to do the church vases, my dear," he said mildly, "you must have been pleased to find the door open."

"I had the keys with me," said his wife coldly, "and that is not the point, Wilfred: *why* was it open?"

"Do you not think, Mrs. Fordington," said the curate bravely, "that it is a good thing to have the church open, all day if possible, so that people may go into it if they choose?"

"Why should people go into it, Mr. Mitchell?"

asked the Vicar's wife severely, glancing across the table to Mr. Ogden.

"They might wish to pray," said the young man, hating himself for what looked like cant. Daphne liked him for saying it.

Mr. Ogden snorted. "And why, sir," he exclaimed, "should they pray there? They can pray at home if they want to, though I daresay it would be better for them to do a little hard work, instead of reeling off prayer like a Chinaman's flying wheel."

"Do you consider work incompatible with prayer then?" asked the young clergyman defiantly.

"I believe in prayer, sir," Mr. Ogden replied angrily. "Real, earnest prayer, sir! at the proper times——"

"Ah, and what do you consider the proper times?" asked Mr. Mitchell.

"The proper time," began Mr. Ogden, who was not quite sure of his footing, and was thinking of a text to floor his adversary, "the proper times are morning and evening in your own home, and on the Sabbath day, in the Lord's House."

There were at least three statements in this answer that Mr. Mitchell longed to tear limb from limb—they were to him—the very dragon, and the world's old enemy, but he contented himself with asking Mr. Ogden a little ironically, and as a preparation for the conflict in store: "Have you chapter and verse for all that—sir—or does the Church teach it?"

Daphne listened with great amusement, but she was almost as startled as the rest of them, when her uncle said in a voice full of pain: "My dear friends! may I ask if this discussion is being carried on in a Christian spirit—and if it is not, would it not be better to refrain?"

"It is a discussion upon Christian topics," Mr. Ogden at length replied.

"But scarcely I would imagine," Mr. Fordington said very quietly, with the pained expression deepening on his face, "scarcely for the Glory of God—and so I venture to think, my dear Ogden—unprofitable."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said young Mitchell quickly, "and yours, Mr. Ogden—I fear I spoke hastily and without due consideration."

Mr. Fordington's face cleared. Mr. Ogden pursed up his mouth rather stubbornly. He was a firm man, and besides, he felt that the text would have come to him in a minute; he was three years older than the Vicar of Overham, but it was certainly not his place to rebuke him. Aslingdon was a larger parish.

Daphne turned to her uncle. "What music shall I bring down after dinner?" she asked. Conversation began again—and the truth had been upheld.

CHAPTER V.

"O fancies that might be! Oh, facts that are!"
ROBERT BROWNING.

MRS. FORDINGTON was forced to take her girls' Bible Class soon after dinner, leaving her niece still playing to the rest. Daphne played well, she played from her emotions. So music took it out of her—as indeed it does, from all those who have it *in* them, and she soon became exhausted.

Her uncle and Mr. Ogden were absorbed in "flies." She turned to the curate, "I wonder why you are here?" she said. "Tell me about it."

The curate had decided at dinner that she was flippant, and not to be trusted; he was therefore surprised to find himself telling her, what he had told to no one—of a slight weakness in his lungs, and the necessity of good air for a year or two. He told her of his passionate love of humanity, with the ambition of a home somewhere in London, and the chance of a life-work among the hurried workers in strange places, so near, some of them, and yet so little understood by the world from which she came.

"Ah!" he said, "the monotony! think of it! One little piece of shoe perhaps—made and remade, minute after minute, through hours, and days, and years, through lives and generations! Lives, spent too, without privacy, without horizon, with neither light nor beauty, and the break in them! The terrible holidays! when their jaded spirits find in the re-action of gross self-indulgence the only joy that it is in their power to attain!

"They talk of 'reversion to type,' what kind of a type are we Englishmen making to send down its curse to posterity, to guard and keep the interests of our Empire? We do not go back to old types in our retrogression, for they were at least free from the complications of modern life. We form new and hideous possibilities; brains that have become machines, and machines in charge of depraved human passions.

"Not even a limited company can get rid of human nature—it can only poison it.

"Think of the bodies and souls of London districts! Have you watched them pour out of factories, or seen them stagger into the only free Homes open to them, at the street corner? We talk about the Church, and we have services on Sunday, and they don't know—and could not practice if they did—the barest decencies of life."

Daphne listened intently. She was quite used to people telling her what they felt. They generally did, for she was by nature sympathetic. That is to say, she voluntarily saw things from other people's points of view, a faculty which has its dangers. She saw now, the grey multitude the curate pictured, and her heart met his in a passionate enthusiasm of pity. She hated the dress she was wearing. It had cost sixteen pounds. One might, she thought, have given it to them somehow, but of course she couldn't stop wearing the dress.

"Oh!" she said, looking into the curate's eyes, "how terribly selfish we are! We are so willing to give up other people's things! I remember hearing an address in town on the East London Fund. The girl I went with cried terribly, and I made resolutions. Then we went to Fuller's and bought some lovely chocolates and had tea. Wasn't it horrible?"

The curate shrugged his shoulders.

"Your uncle's is a very easy parish," he said; "sometimes it makes me feel as if I were buying chocolates."

"Yes," she said, "but in two years——"

His eyes grew grave and happy. "If I am permitted in two years," he said, "I shall think myself a most fortunate man."

She felt irritated. He was throwing himself away. "My uncle is a very good man," she said, "yet *he* does not consider it necessary to work in the slums."

"Mr. Fordington is married," said the curate slowly. "That—is very different."

Suddenly she knew that he was thinking of some girl, and that it was hard. "I understand," she said gently; "so you won't marry?"

"One must give up one's life to one's work," he said.

"And one's love?" said Daphne.

The curate glanced at her hurriedly. Then he looked away. The Vicar was happily examining his fishing gear with Mr. Ogden. Below them, in the parish room, the monotonous unwavering tones of Mrs. Fordington's Bible-Class voice, were quite audible. "That belongs to one's work, too," he said finally.

"Ah! you poor, dear young man!" thought Daphne to herself, "are you so very sure?"

After they had gone, she asked her uncle, a little suddenly, if there were any nice girls in the parish.

"The Overham young ladies," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "play hockey very well in the winter, and they have tennis in the summer. I imagine your aunt would tell you, that they all teach in Sunday school, but I am not quite sure!"

"Good Heavens!" cried Daphne, "don't they read, think, or work, have they no interests, no resources, no characters?"

"My dear!" said her uncle smiling outright now, "you are very impulsive. They are good, sensible, English girls. I daresay you would find them a little dull, a trifle local, too, perhaps. You see there is little excitement in a place like this, and a great paucity of young men."

"That has nothing to do with it," flashed Daphne angrily.

Her uncle laughed aloud. "Oh, yes, my dear! it has!" he said. "It has everything in the world to do with it!"

"Well," said Daphne smiling unwillingly, "am I supposed to play tennis too?"

"You may play any game you like," said her uncle with quick gravity, "Daphne dear—if you play fair."

"I don't know what you mean," said Daphne blushing, but she knew perfectly well; and, as she kissed him good-night, she thought almost as much of his penetration as of his charity.

Mrs. Fordington found her husband alone. "Wilfred," she said, "don't tell me that you let her flirt with that young Mitchell?"

"My dear Emma," said her husband, "Mitchell doesn't know how to flirt, and Daphne has gone to bed."

"I knew we should have trouble," sighed his wife, "the moment I saw that low-necked dress."

"My dear! you wear them yourself," her husband pleaded.

"Yes, but they do not look the same on me," she replied; "besides, she has three enormous trunks." The Vicar was silent. His silences often baffled his wife, for she felt as if they did not come from her having convinced him—she did not dream they came from his being unable to talk down to her level. "I can't understand you, Wilfred," she said, "you always seem to evade my arguments."

"My dear Emma," he said, "they are unanswerable, and we are very late. I hope the girls' class after your full afternoon did not tire you."

"Well!" said Mrs. Fordington, not yet fully mollified, "whether I am tired or not, I hope I always do my duty."

"I am quite sure you do," said her husband; "I will just see if Dora is asleep before I go to bed."

"You simply spoil that child, Wilfred," said his wife, and she did not offer to go with him.

CHAPTER VI.

"It requires a long time to know any one."
SANCHO PANZA'S PROVERBS.

DAPHNE grew to like Overham, and indeed it would have been strange if she had not. She carried the place by storm. The men liked her because she was so uncommonly well up on subjects which interested them. She was a good listener. The women, who at first were inclined to stand off—partly because she dressed so well and was hard to snub—were quite won over by her deprecating way of asking advice from them about subjects on which they knew nothing.

Daphne was not consciously insincere, but mingled with an intense desire to please lay a dramatic ability, too delightful to be subdued. She let herself go, and afterwards she was sorry. She came too soon through all conventions and polite barriers into the garden of souls, and when she found potatoes instead of roses, she tried to get out again. The result was, that sometimes she did a good deal of damage in the garden, for she was usually disappointed—and she undervalued potatoes altogether.

One of the first things she did was to offer to play the organ, but her uncle told her that there was a girl who did that already.

" She is a fine girl," he said ; " I should like to introduce her to you, she is so absolutely true."

" I'm afraid that means that she is very abrupt and wears a sailor hat, doesn't it ? " asked Daphne smiling up at him, as she dusted the books in his study. It was one of her gifts to handle books properly, and even when she took them out to put them back in their proper places and right side up.

" Yes," said her uncle, " in this case it does mean that, but it also means a great deal more. She is very poor, and lives with a widowed mother, who is in some ways unfortunate. They manage to rub on somehow, with what the girl does, training choirs, giving music lessons, and the like. She does most of the work in the parish. She is coming to give Dora a lesson this morning, but I want them to go out and pick primroses instead. It is such a lovely morning, perhaps you would like to go with them ? "

Daphne nodded. " I think it would do me good," she said.

Her uncle looked at her as if he would like to say something, but he checked himself. He had come to the conclusion that if you wished someone to like someone else, it is wiser not to tell them so.

A few minutes later, Daphne was formally introduced to Katherine Linton.

It was not until they had reached a certain wood, carpeted with primroses, where Dora, silent with delight, was tremulously and hurriedly digging her little hands into the cool, mossy home of them, that Daphne began to take stock of her companion. She was smaller than Daphne, and had a face and figure almost too strong to be pretty, but in spite of this she was pretty, by reason of a complexion typically English, and yet so rare, that not even in England does one come across it often. She had the skin of a little child, clear white, with shades and tints that made a wild rose, hackneyed as the comparison seems, the only term for it; but it was her mouth that pleased Daphne most. It was beautiful, and on it one saw her character written plainly.

"I wonder why my uncle never told me about you before?" Daphne said.

Katherine laughed. "Why should he?" she asked, "and what on earth was there to tell you? I am his organist and he is very good to me."

"He certainly wouldn't be likely to tell me that!" said Daphne. "But he might have said that you were simply delightful, and that I should be sure to like you immensely!"

Katherine's eyes flashed and she bit her lips. "You are simply laughing at me!" she said, "and I don't like it!"

Daphne felt suddenly young and abashed. There were a hundred ways in which she might contradict this, but she used none of them. "I am so sorry," she said, "I am afraid that it was just my way of talking."

"You have no business to talk that way, unless you mean it," said Katherine.

Daphne had never been spoken to like this before. She burst out laughing. Katherine looked perplexed for a moment, but she soon joined her. "And do you mean to say," said Daphne at last, "that you never say nice things to people?"

"I don't think lies *are* nice," said Katherine firmly.

"Oh, yes, they are, awfully," said Daphne, "and, besides, you know, nice things aren't always lies, anymore than rude things are always true!"

Katherine turned penitent. "Oh, Miss Fordington!" she said, "I am afraid I was dreadfully rude."

Daphne laughed. "I can assure you," she said, "I liked it immensely, and it is most bracing, but please call me Daphne, it sounds so much more natural in a wood—and even out of it!"

"No. I shall not do that," said Katherine Linton.

"Are you afraid you wouldn't mean it?" said Daphne smiling.

"No," said Katherine, "I am not."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, what principle does it offend?" cried Daphne.

"I am your uncle's organist," said Katherine.

"I am his niece," said Daphne, "but what of it?" Their eyes met, and they looked long and hard at each other. Then suddenly Daphne leaned forward and kissed her. "Now, what are you going to call me?" she asked. "You have a perfect right to call me most impertinent."

"Well, I won't call you that—Daphne," said Katherine very slowly.

Katherine went home with the knowledge that life had become rich in possibilities. She was one of those people who love, very simply, and very entirely—and so as a natural consequence—very rarely. She thought Daphne was wonderful.

Daphne shrugged her shoulders over the episode, that was what she called it. "Now," she said, "when I go away from here, I shall have to write to that girl. I wonder why I made her call me Daphne?"

"Cousin Daphne," said Dora very slowly, "I wish you wouldn't pin those primroses."

"Why, sweetheart," said Daphne, "don't you think they look nice there?"

"Yes, but it must hurt them terribly," said Dora, "and they have such good faces."

Daphne hesitated, but she loved children. "All right, Dora," she said, "put them in water with yours, and then come and lie down while Daphne reads to you."

"My dear Daphne," said her Aunt, coming in, "Dora has missed her lessons, and she must really practise a little now. I should be glad if you would help me do the Parish library accounts." Daphne obeyed, but came back to find Dora in tears over her five-finger exercises.

"I can always find my fingers," Dora explained tearfully; "but oh, I can't never find the keys!" Daphne shut the piano gently, and together they arranged the primroses.

CHAPTER VII.

"The worldly Hope, men set their Hearts upon,
Turns Ashes—or it prospers ; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone."

RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM.

AN event was at last going to happen at Overham, Lady Middleton, Daphne's stepmother, was going to take a house in the neighbourhood for three months. It is perhaps one of the things that is most to be envied in possessors of riches, that they can take houses, really beautiful houses, in places of a thousand lovely kinds, and sink into them as naturally as to-morrow follows to-day for a few months, and then drift out of them with equal ease and comfort to other places also prepared for them.

The rich are not indifferent to pain, nor cruel to poverty, they are merely ignorant of daily bread, and the efforts required to attain it. They have much of the happy-go-lucky fatalism to be found among the outcasts of society, and the tramps in hedges ; only the one class learns it in defiance of an experience that has proved too hard, and the other from an absence of experience which has proved too comfortable.

Lady Middleton was of this latter sort. She had been known to scold a poor governess for walking on a cold winter's day without furs, and when the governess had remarked with some spirit that she had not got them, she became very vague indeed, and said she supposed that there was a society for that sort of thing. Then she rang for some cold milk and biscuits for the governess.

Lady Middleton's first child had married well, she had three thousand a year pin money, and she had known little of her husband. Daphne, her step-daughter, she had taken great trouble over, and Daphne was much prettier than her own daughter, but she was more wilful. She even said she wished to know before-hand something of her husband, which Lady Middleton had felt was not quite nice. However, she meant to do her duty by her, and for that purpose had taken a place at Overham, filled it with servants and pretty things, and had invited suitable guests. Among them Lady Cheston and her twin daughters Alice and Maude, who, if they had not worn different ribbons on their clothes, could scarcely have been told apart. The difficulty, as Lady Cheston herself explained, was obviated by the fact that it didn't make the slightest difference, as nobody cared, except perhaps, Alice and Maude.

With them came their brother Reggie, whom no one except the servants seemed to remember as Lord Cheston, and David Grey, who owned a good deal of property and the handsomest head in London. There was also a young American said to be literary, and certainly amusing. The men almost at once began to call him Russell, and the women equally soon discovered that his first name was Bert. The party was finished off by the lion of the season, a certain well-known surgeon, who had added hypnotism to his other talents.

Lady Middleton wished Daphne to marry David Grey, or, if the child preferred an alternative, she had no real objection to Reggie, though he had little money. Sir Henry Middleton came down for Sundays. He was ten years younger than his wife.

Lady Middleton went to call at once upon Mrs. Fordington. "You must really let me borrow Daphne," she said, looking at Mrs. Fordington's afternoon dress, and deciding that she was "impossible." "I have not seen the dear child for so long. A few days with some of her old friends may do her good, don't you think?" She added in the same breath, "I should so much like to live in a vicarage. Don't you find it charming?"

Mrs. Fordington had not asked herself this question. "The house is rather too small," she said, "and the garden too large——"

"Oh, but *can* a garden be too large, dear Mrs.

Fordington?" said Lady Middleton looking intensely earnest, and wondering whether Daphne would come in. "I never feel as if I could breathe without an horizon."

"I was thinking of gardeners," said Mrs. Fordington, "they are an additional expense."

"Oh, yes! of course," said Lady Middleton with enthusiasm; "but then, they wear such *nice* hats, don't they?—and know the names of flowers—I do think it's *so* clever of them! I have often wanted to ask some one who knew. Do you really think they're *good*, Mrs. Fordington?"

"*My* gardeners are," said the Vicar's wife, "but then I keep my eye on them."

"*How* clever of you! I wish I could, but I always say to them, 'Now, my dear creatures, please *don't* turn up in the wrong places, and *never* appear suddenly in secluded corners,' and then, you see, they keep out of the way, and I can assure you they are no trouble at all. But I'm so glad that you think they're *good*."

The Vicar entered at this moment, much to his wife's relief.

Lady Middleton stretched out both her hands to him. "My dear Wilfred," she said, "how unspeakably like dear John you are!" And then she burst into tears. Mrs. Fordington looked hopelessly at the bell-rope, and then at the family bible. She was seldom at a loss when there was anything to be done, but for a moment she stood paralyzed before she opened a window.

"Oh, thank you *so*," said Lady Middleton, whose dress she had trod on as she passed, "*how* kind you both are to me! I know you'll let me have Daphne for a few days—she will be such a comfort to me."

"Of course you can have Daphne," said her brother-in-law, but he did not refer to "dear John."

A few minutes later Lady Middleton was telling them both of a wonderful cure for sin. "It's all *so* easy," she explained. "You are hypnotised by a really good man, who says to you, 'When you wake up, such and such a sin will be loathsome to you,' and whatever it is, debt, or drink, or betting, you just wake up hating it, and in the same way you get to love your neighbour, and make sacrifices, and go to church regularly, and be nice to your maid, and do real good in every possible way—and don't you think, dear Wilfred, we might try it on here?" The Vicar gasped.

Mrs. Fordington's patience was at an end. "My dear Lady Middleton," she said with some firmness, "your suggestion is absolutely unpractical, and, though I am sure you do not mean to be so, it strikes me as exceedingly irreverent."

Lady Middleton got very red. "You misunderstand, Mrs.—er—Fordington," she said. "I was speaking to your husband."

Mrs. Fordington rose, and swept majestically to the door. "Good-afternoon, Lady Middleton," she said, facing her adversary with an intense indignation that was not becoming. "In that case, I will leave you with my husband!"

"How clever of you," murmured Lady Middleton, then she turned to the Vicar with her sweetest smile. "I'm so sorry to have vexed your wife, dear Wilfred," she said, "but women who have not read, or thought, or *lived* deeply, scarcely understand these things. I feel barely on the threshold of them myself."

The Vicar smiled. "If you take my advice, Vera," he said, "you will remain on the threshold. I am afraid the agricultural mind is not receptive to new ideas. Why not try your theory, if you feel sure of its efficacy, upon some of your personal friends?"

"It requires active willingness, and a blank mind," explained Lady Middleton."

"Well, surely," said the Vicar, "you could supply both those requirements—outside the labouring classes."

Lady Middleton looked discouraged, but a happy thought struck her. "I will find a child," she exclaimed, "that is what I want, a school child for a penny an hour——"

The Vicar cut her short. "Not a single school child from this parish, Vera," he said sternly; "I do not approve of experiments upon children."

Lady Middleton's face fell again, but at that moment she saw through the window Katherine Linton and Daphne crossing the lawn.

The Vicar had scarcely time to open the long French window, and free her dress from a nail, before she made a graceful dash out into the garden, and caught Daphne in her arms. "My dearest, dearest child!" she said, kissing her passionately, "at last I have you!"

Daphne looked startled and annoyed; unconsciously she clung to Katherine's hand as if she were afraid. "I did not know you would be here—so soon," she answered finally. Lady Middleton poured out her plan for Daphne's visit. "I have not introduced you to Katherine," said Daphne, after she had listened carefully to all her stepmother said, and wondered not a little, as to what she meant, and didn't say. "She is to have a holiday for a week, may she come with me?"

Lady Middleton's eyes turned hard for a moment, but a glance at Daphne showed her that she must change her attitude, or lose her game. Unconsciously the two girls faced her, as if they were her enemies. She smiled charmingly. "You must let me call you Katherine, dear," she said, "and I should quite *love* to have you both. Will you come to-morrow?"

Katherine was silent and perplexed. She would have refused at once, but for what looked like fear in Daphne's face. The two had grown, in the last few weeks, into a friendship for each other so profound and absorbing that they seemed capable of a communion as much beyond words as it was independent of them.

She smiled, and said naturally, "I am afraid, Lady Middleton, I have no decent clothes."

Lady Middleton was quite shocked, and became vague in a moment. "You dear child!" she said, "come in anything! Daphne will help you. It is all quite simple. I don't *believe* in luxury, it always seems to me to be not really Christian, I like *quiet* comfort."

Daphne met her stepmother's eyes again. "Comfort is so expensive," she said, "isn't it? I mean one's own comfort."

"Dear child!"—murmured Lady Middleton. She kissed her good-bye, and shook hands caressingly with Katherine.

The Vicar took her to her carriage, before she got in she handed him a cheque for £50. "My dear Wilfred," she said, "please buy something really *nice* for your people with this. It might provide Christmas trees, mightn't it? or spring clothes for the children? I think it never does to be indefinite, don't you? But you will know best, I am sure, as to what is most suitable. I will send the carriage to-morrow for dear Daphne. It was a great grief to me to give the child up, but I felt that I owed it to *you*. After all I am only her stepmother!"

"Thank God for that!" said the Vicar solemnly to himself. He did not tell Lady Middleton that it was kind of her to give him the cheque. She wondered a little afterwards at his omission, but decided to herself that his breath had been taken away by her generosity. As a matter of fact, the Vicar said to himself that Lady Middleton was paying a little hush money to Providence. He wondered what for, but Daphne knew.

CHAPTER VIII.

> " Courage slays giddiness at abysses ;
> And when is not man confronted with abysses ? '
>
> NIETSCHE.

" DAPHNE," said Katherine, when they were left alone, " why did you make me give in? You know I shall not be at home there. What is that you want me for? If I didn't think you wanted me, nothing would induce me to go."

" Well—I do want you," said Daphne. They walked towards a garden seat and sat down, with a silence between them which expressed a confidence deeper than words; yet words were to follow as an outcome of their confidence. It was Katherine who spoke first.

" There is one thing that you ought to understand," she said, " and that is that I should never have let you become my friend."

" I do not think that it is necessary for me to understand that now, Katherine, it is too late! " said Daphne smiling.

Through the open window the white-capped maid was preparing tea, they watched her carefully.

"But I want to tell you," said Katherine; "I think you ought to know."

"I ought to know nothing that does not make it easier for you," replied Daphne firmly.

"I think it would make it—easier," said Katherine. Mrs. Fordington entered the drawing-room, and spoke shortly to the maid, who had been extravagant over jam sandwiches. Daphne frowned.

"Then—tell me," she said.

"People don't call much—on my mother," said Katherine. "That's all."

Daphne had seen Mrs. Linton, a pretty, dark woman, who was an officer's widow. "I have often wondered why," said Daphne.

"But you never asked me!" said Katherine, her voice trembling a little.

"Dearest, why should I? It could make no difference to us. And there are so many things one can't tell."

"There is nothing that I could not tell you!" said Katherine.

Daphne smiled a little. "Tell me—then," she repeated.

"My father is alive," said Katherine quietly, "and I have never seen him. Captain Linton was not—my father. People think there is something wrong, but, of course, no one knows the truth."

"Does anyone—ever know the truth?" said Daphne wearily.

"Yes," said Katherine. There was an absolute silence again, except for a boisterous thrush, tossing his views of spring across to a blackbird digging up a worm, and far too busy to answer him. Daphne put her hand over Katherine's. "Don't!" said Katherine quickly.

Mrs. Fordington walked out on to the lawn. "Miss Linton," she said coldly, "will you come in to tea?"

Katherine excused herself and went home. "Mother, dear," she said, "do you think you could spare me for a week to-morrow? I will come in and see every day how you are getting on. Daphne wants me to go with her to her step-mother's."

"That would be Lady Middleton's, wouldn't it?" her mother asked, laying down some expensive embroidery.

"Yes, mother."

"Well, dear, I have always wanted you to see some society; but the people are so strange here. They never call, I can't understand it," sighed Mrs. Linton. She always lived on that side of her mystery. It was far harder for Katherine than if she had permitted them both to face the truth. "You'll have to have some new clothes, you know, and I could get some money for you quite easily. I think it's so cruel of you, Katherine, never to let me have any money! It is not for myself I complain, but it is so terrible to see my daughter a fright, and to know that we could afford a really good carpet."

"Mother, dear," said Katherine firmly, "I will never touch any of that money, nor, so long as you choose to live with me, shall you. Daphne and I have seen about clothes, and she is giving me some of hers."

"Do you mean to say you are accepting charity?" almost screamed Mrs. Linton.

Katherine winced as if she had been struck. Then she smothered a retort that had risen to her lips. "I do not look upon it in that light, mother," she said.

"Katherine," said Mrs. Linton, "you are a fool. That girl is only amusing herself with you."

"Mother," said Katherine, "I am not going to stay here and listen to your abuse of my friends!"

Mrs. Linton laughed. "This is the kind of brawl, my dear child, that you treat me to so often. You have your father's temper." Katherine clenched her teeth, and for a moment her mother seemed quelled. "And his little tricks of manner," she concluded.

Her daughter walked towards the door. Their discussions usually ended this way.

"Katherine—come back!" her mother called after her. The girl turned, her eyes were blazing. "I hope you will have a good time, dear," said her mother gently. "And when you're angry, don't stride, it looks ridiculous."

Katherine checked herself again, and moving swiftly over to her mother, caught both her hands. "You'll be all right, dear, till I come back?" she whispered.

Mrs. Linton laughed. "Silly child," she said, "kiss me, and go and see to your frocks! You are a good child, too, you know, and almost a pretty one." Katherine drew herself away from her mother angrily.

She was alternately repelled and fascinated by her, and since sixteen she had worked for her and watched over her with the devotion of a slave and the strength of a master. Her reward was that she kept her mother, and that though people talked, they did not know that worse than what they said was true, neither did they guess that Katherine and Mrs. Linton knew that they said it. Katherine had to work hard, and she had never left her mother alone before. The moment the door shut, Mrs. Linton moved swiftly and gracefully over to her writing-table, and tore up a letter she had written. The she began to cry, walking up and down the room. She did all this as dramatically as if she had an audience, but she did not cry very hard.

When Katherine returned, she was still doing embroidery. "I am afraid you will tire your eyes, mother," Katherine said.

"My eyes are always tired, Katherine," replied her mother, "I am going to bed." They said good-night but they did not kiss each other.

After her mother had gone to bed, Katherine saw the paper on the floor. It had been torn so loosely, that she could read the address. "Well! she tore up the letter," said Katherine, "so it's all right. I can go to-morrow!"

She rose to her feet almost light-heartedly. She had lived so long and so closely with tragedy, that she had grown quite used to it. There were times when it wouldn't leave one alone, when there seemed no let up, for the emotions, and there were times when it would. It was Katherine's nature to believe that there were more of the easier times, and to face the hard ones when they came with the quietness of a great courage.

CHAPTER IX.

> "That we devote ourselves to God is seen
> In living just as if, no God there were."
>
> ROBERT BROWNING.

THE two girls were in their room dressing for dinner. From their window the view of wood and hill, with here and there a great red field, and the new-born freshness of green trees, delighted them both.

"I must tell you about them all," said Daphne, "David and Reggie are great friends of mine. I think they both want to marry me, but I'm not sure. I am quite sure Vera wishes me to marry them both, or *would*, if it were 'quite nice,' to have two husbands, one for his title, and the other for his money, David's family is good as well. Mr. Russell I know also, but I don't understand him, he says very pretty things. The twins would be immensely nice, if there was only one of them, as it is, there is too much 'repetition,' even their own mother laughs at them."

"Daphne, how horrid!" exclaimed Katherine.

Daphne looked surprised. "My dear girl," she said, "they're simply absurd."

"I hate you when you talk like that!" said

Katherine twisting her hair back fiercely. "You ought to know it's unkind to laugh at people! you wouldn't like it yourself!"

"What a dear, you are!" said Daphne; "but you had better let me do your hair, you have a way of making it as rigid as your principles, and stiff hair is horrible you know. Then there's Lady Cheston," she went on, giving finishing touches to her companion's dress. "You won't like her, I know. She smokes and flirts with David. She will marry him if I don't, that's why Vera has her here, she thinks it will put me on my mettle. Keep still, Katherine, you're restive! Then there is Arthur Field, the great surgeon, who became a hypnotist, he's one of Vera's passions, but they are all very innocent, she is only dangerous when she tackles theories, and he's not a sham."

"Do you like him?" asked Katherine.

"Oh, one doesn't *like* those sort of people you know," said Daphne fastening on a rose. "One justs talks about them. It's an amusement, like a pianola, Vera has a pianola. By-the-bye, she has picked up Mr. Mitchell somewhere, and invited him to dinner; he will be rather out of it I should imagine, but she always has a parson, she thinks a great deal of her soul." Daphne watched her friend—she was blushing. "You are very silent, Katherine," she said.

"I have nothing at all to say," said Katherine, the colour deepening in her face.

"Is that quite true?" Daphne asked her, drawing her into her arms.

"Well! I'm not going to say it, anyway," Katherine admitted.

Daphne smiled down at her. "I think Mr. Mitchell is very nice," she whispered.

"And I am trying not to think so, Daphne," said Katherine quietly.

"And he?" asked Daphne.

"We can neither of us marry," said Katherine; "I could not spoil his work, nor leave my mother, but you mustn't think it's a trouble, Daphne dear, it did not go far enough for that."

The dinner-bell rang, and, without a word, they went down into the drawing-room. Reggie and David were talking to the twins, who were dressed in pink and blue. They looked as if they were saying the same things. Lady Cheston was laughing very loudly at something Arthur Field had said.

Katherine noticed him at once, he had a face like an eagle, and eyes that, if they were not on you, still gave the impression that they saw you. Bert Russell took her into dinner. She was glad he was an American, for it gave her a safe topic, but he took it away from her at once.

"Yes, I have been ever so long in England, I can see you're going to ask me, and I do think it's a perfectly fascinating country, though I'm not sure I like to ride in a small box, instead of a car, and drawn by a toy engine as well."

Katherine laughed. "I was afraid you'd be difficult to talk to," she said, "but I don't believe you will."

"Oh, don't you worry about that!" said Bert smiling, "American men are always easy to talk to; you see they have listened to American women, and when they meet an English woman with half-a-dozen words, and the loveliest complexion, they put a value on their chance."

Katherine couldn't help smiling, his intonation, which was less than an accent, but more than a drawl, had something irresistibly funny about it, yet she felt that he needed snubbing.

"You're a friend of Miss Daphne's, aren't you?" he went on. "I should so much like to know, is it true, that if I were to say what I really thought about her, it would make you angry?"

"I can't possibly tell," said Katherine; "but if it were what you really thought, I daresay I shouldn't mind, though I shall probably disagree with you."

"Yes, that's just what I fancied," said Bert with evident mischief. "I think—she's such a perfectly lovely girl!"

Katherine tried to look put out, and failed. "Well," she answered, "I am obliged to confess, I fully agree with that."

"But you do hate to agree with me," said Bert, "I can see that. I wonder why?"

"Because you are so flippant," said Katherine.

"Good Heavens, Miss Linton, you never made a greater mistake in your life! I couldn't be flippant if I tried, it wouldn't be possible for me! My faults lie all on the other side. You might as well accuse a County Council of being generous! I do think that's such a rich institution, though for the best joke I ever struck, give me the Church of England!"

"What do you mean by talking of the Church of England as a joke?" asked Katherine indignantly.

"Well, I confess," said the American ruefully, "it's like most English jokes, they have to be repeated twice before you can catch the meaning—and you couldn't, you know, repeat the Church of England twice! It's unique."

"I wish you wouldn't say such things," said Katherine, "they are very irreverent, and so cheap."

The young man glanced at her approvingly. "I guess you're right," he said, "I will be like Paul!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Katherine stiffly.

"Obedient to the Heavenly Vision," Bert answered very softly.

"I wish I hadn't asked you!" cried Katherine, blushing furiously.

"That's the beauty of girls," he replied calmly, "they want to run away, but they tell you where they're going to; sometimes they don't run so very fast either!"

"Oh! you're insufferable!" exclaimed Katherine.

"No! you aren't used to me, that's all. I am an acquired taste, you must try to see a great deal of me."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. I don't wish to acquire the taste," said Katherine frowning.

"Well! that's not a very good beginning," said the young man thoughtfully; "still, if you felt indifferent, I should be more discouraged."

"Well, I—I do feel indifferent!" cried Katherine defiantly.

"Oh, you just *say* that," said Bert. "If you could see your own eyes you'd know it wasn't true. I am awfully sorry for you."

"I'm sure I don't know why," said Katherine.

"Oh, because you can't see your own eyes," he explained, "you miss so much!"

Now Katherine knew it would be impossible to plunge knives or dig forks into this horrible fountain of personality beside her, but words, which were never good friends to her, forsook her utterly, and she was more thankful than she could have thought possible to Lady Middleton, when she started a general conversation.

"Now, I think, Mr. Field," she began, "if you could put an end to drunkenness, it might be a better world!"

"Better stuff, and nonsense!" said the great surgeon, with some brutality, "you can't stop human nature. What's drink, anyway, but an effect? you've got to go to your cause, and causes aren't easy to stop. There are poisons all around us, and we use them, and abuse them as we will, some of them we shut up and call bad names, others we don't even mention, but there's an instinct that is inside of us, which goes for them as naturally as a dog to a bone; the bone is not to blame if by some chance there's rat poison on it, and if you were to take it away, the dog wouldn't thank you, it would probably bite."

"Ah! how true!" said Lady Middleton.

Mr. Field looked at her as if he would have liked the dog to have bitten her. "To begin with you couldn't stop drink," he continued. "If there were no wine or beer, people would get drunk on eau de cologne, or paraffin, or methylated spirits, and if you did stop drink, it wouldn't make any difference."

"Ah, and what would?" asked Lady Middleton.

"A new heart," said the curate suddenly.

Mr. Field shot a contemptuous glance at him which became interested as he forgot his cloth and looked at his face. "You're quite right," he said curtly. "But the question is, providing it's a possibility, who wants it? We, none of us, want to get any better, we prefer a religion that doesn't interfere with our lives; what we really wish is, that nobody else should get any worse, particularly the poor, they might make it so uncomfortable for the rest of us."

"Then there is no salvation for the world?" said Daphne very slowly.

Arthur Field looked at her strangely. The unreal party were silent, they thought such things were uncomfortable and rather shocking.

"The world is going to be burnt up, they say," Arthur Field said at last. "That is a great satisfaction to me personally."

"And there is going to be a new Heaven, and a new earth," said Mr. Mitchell, he did not add, "they say."

David Grey laughed insolently. "I don't know that I should altogether like that!" he said.

"You probably wouldn't *be* there!" Katherine found herself retorting very indignantly. There was a general laugh.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Bert Russell, "that somebody else is going to catch it besides me, I felt kind of lost!"

Lady Middleton rose to her feet. "Meantime, there is our earth here," she quoted with a smile. "You may amuse yourselves as you like," she said to the men. "Reggie, please act as host. It's such a lovely night, you will probably find us in the garden."

"With the other flowers," said Bert Russell as he opened the door.

"Daphne," said Katherine as they walked out on to the lawn, "what a perfectly odious young man!"

"Who?" said Daphne thoughtfully.

CHAPTER X.

"Is Hope not plumed, as 'twere a fiery dart ?
And oh ! thou dying day,
Even as thou goest, must she too depart
And Sorrow fold such pinions on the heart as will not fly away ?"

D. G. Rossetti.

THERE are times when one cannot accept the reassurance of the external world. When bright sunlight is a mockery, and a peaceful evening a gibe at our own restlessness.

Daphne, waiting for what she knew was inevitable, underwent this rebellion to nature. The exquisite fresh beauty of the May night, with its deepening tints across the sky, the rising moon, and the last broken songs of sleepy birds, stung her with a sense of how alone she was, and in what alien surroundings. She was waiting for what she, above all things, hoped, and feared, desired, and trembled at. She wanted to escape, and she wanted to be recaptured. In fact she wanted (as in the depths of our hearts we all want) both to eat our cake and have it unbroken, to accomplish, and yet not to reach the goal. It was only when the actual, sharp, decisive tread of the surgeon approached her, that she realized she had only one emotion left, a fear that kept her from moving away.

"Oh!" he said, "it is you, Daphne! it is you!" For a moment he stood gazing down at her. The hardness of his eyes becoming tender, until he ceased to look as the world knew him, and looked as she only could make him look. "It has been a long three years," he said at last, "and you are much, much more beautiful!"

Then she took courage and began to speak. "Arthur, you should never have come—why did you come? I had learnt how to be good, how to do without you! These three years have been long indeed, long enough to show me that what I promised was wrong, and that I can never, never keep it! Oh! Arthur, it was cruel of you to come back! Let me go, promise you will let me go?" He pointed to a seat sheltered by the house.

"Sit down," he said, "and don't be afraid!" She obeyed him with a little gesture of despair.

"You have made me afraid of all the world—and you!" she said. He passed up and down once or twice in front of her. Then he turned and faced her.

"You begged me to leave you," he said, "because you were so young, and it was all such a shock; but, you don't suppose I meant to keep away, do you? You, yourself said, 'Come back in three years.' I have worked alone, and it has been hard, but I thought it only fair to give you time, and you were worth waiting for, Daphne! What mistakes I have made, have been paid for out of hand. I don't mean to make you suffer for them. I have a plan which is perfectly easy and simple to put before you. It will not remove the essential difficulty that will have to remain your secret and mine, but it will remove all the obvious disadvantages, and give you a perfectly recognized position before the world, but I won't go into details unless you trust me. You *must* trust me or we can go no further. I suppose I was a fool to let you go? The next I hear is that the girl who was to train herself into the courage of her emotions, means to marry with no emotions whatever a raw boy out of a college because he happens to have money and position. Do you break no moral law there, Daphne?"

"I didn't say I would marry him," moaned the girl, "I only told Vera she might have him here—if she liked."

"To help you make up your mind about me?" he suggested.

"Arthur," she said, "won't you let me go? Won't you please let me go?" The surgeon knitted his brows in perplexity as he looked down at her. If she had ceased to care for him, she would never have asked him this question, there would have been no need, she had only to say "I do not love you." If she had not ceased to care for him, how could he let her go for another man? And as for any alternative—there was no alternative for a girl like Daphne, and no other alternative for a man like himself. He knew that there is no safety for passion, but in the definite, and the irrevocable. Compromise is but a flimsy barrier, in the war of emotions, ready to fall at the lifting of an eye-lash, or the touch of a hand. He realized that he was the more responsible, because he knew this so much better than she did, but it was hard to keep back the words that sprang to his lips, and the thoughts that thrilled his heart, as he looked at her. He tried not to look at her, but he could not cease to see her.

"Ah!" he said at last, "how I have hoped for this! Do you want me to let you go? Tell me, Daphne?" He bent over her as he spoke, and put his hands on her shoulders. She looked up at him, and tried to speak, it was so much too difficult to send him away, and yet, in her heart of hearts, she knew that she could never do anything else, and still she could not speak. "Well! you don't cry!" he said with grudging admiration for the face beneath his.

"No! I don't cry," repeated Daphne sadly, "but I am much more unhappy than if I did!" He gave an exclamation of impatience, and let her go only just in time, for the young American had turned the corner, which sheltered them, and the light of his cigarette, made a warning signal in the dark.

"Ah, now! Mr. Field!" he said, "were you hypnotizing Miss Daphne? You were so very still; tell me, Miss Daphne, what sin do you want to be saved from? Maybe if I think hard like Mr. Field, it'll work doubly quick, and you'll wake up hating it?"

The girl gave a gasp of relief. "Take me indoors, Bert," she said, "this night is—cold. It is too early to play at summer!"

"Why, yes! it's pretty fresh!" agreed the young American, "and how you are shivering, Miss Daphne." He took her into the empty billiard-room, where a bright wood fire was burning. "Why! your little hands," he said very gently, "your little hands are just as cold!" He rubbed them between his own, and she let him without a word, sinking back into the chair he had brought her, and closing her eyes.

"Oh! I'm so glad I can trust you, Bert," she said at last.

"Why, certainly!" he said, "you can trust me, why not?"

Daphne did not answer. She felt as if he had carried her in, out of a storm. She was quite exhausted, and the worst of it was, the storm was still outside. A few minutes later, Lady Cheston and David Grey burst into the room.

Lady Cheston gave a shriek of laughter when she saw them. "Oh! you have left a savage creature out there, Daphne!" she said. "I mean the rude, quiet man, Wood—Hill—Field—some country name, isn't it? I asked him just for fun, you know, how he came to do hypnotism, and he blazed out at me, 'If you want to see performing dogs go to a circus!'"

"And served you jolly well right, you know!" said David Grey. "Beastly kind of thing to say to a man when——" he stopped suddenly, and glanced at Daphne.

"You might finish your sentence," said Lady Cheston crossly.

David Grey gave a short laugh, and picked up a rose of Daphne's, which had fallen to the floor. He put it in his button-hole. "There isn't any need to finish the sentence," he said. "Where are the twins?"

"They're singin' duets to the curate," said Lady Cheston with another little shriek. "And Vera's talkin' to him about teachin' Sunday School teachers the harp, she thinks they'll be able to enter more into the lives of Old Testament characters! And—give me a cigarette, David! The girl with the mouth is reforming, Reggie." She suddenly remembered Daphne. "Oh, my dear, I forgot you," she said, "I'm always sayin' awful things before girls!" David frowned.

"Do you want to smoke?" he said; "you haven't lit your cigarette yet, you know?"

"I believe you think it'll stop me talkin'," said Lady Cheston archly, as she accepted a match.

"Good Lord, no!" said David with some bluntness.

He turned insolently to Daphne. "And you," he said, "do you want a match too?"

Bert Russell stepped quickly in between them. "Thank you, awfully," he said, "I shouldn't mind." Then he also turned to Daphne, "Do you mind my smoking in here?" he said. Lady Cheston got very red.

"No!" said Daphne, "oh, no! I don't mind your smoking!" She got up as she spoke, and walked slowly towards the door. The group looked after her, silenced for a moment. Then David flung down his cigarette, and left the room. The American told a very, very funny story to Lady Cheston.

"Daphne," said David overtaking her at the foot of the staircase, "will you marry me?"

"Oh! I suppose so," said Daphne wearily, "but don't talk about it, and for Heaven's sake don't come near me!" For a moment, they looked at each other. The man's eyes were hungry with passion, the girl's indifferent with pain.

"I don't seem to get much out of this, do I?" he said. "In London you were more generous with me."

"Oh! but I never let you kiss me!" cried Daphne with sudden emotion.

"And now—you are never going to let anybody else—kiss you," said David.

She felt her breath coming quick and fast under his eyes. Then she looked beyond him, and saw Arthur Field. She made a tremendous effort to pull herself together, the lights on the floor danced before her eyes. She could hear the twins singing in the drawing-room. The hall door opened, and a rush of cool night air entered, and with it—Katherine. She glanced towards the staircase, and without a word passed Arthur, and then David.

"Get me some brandy!" she said to the surgeon contemptuously. "Can't you see the girl's going to faint?" she threw her strong arms round Daphne, who clung to her silently, as a child in a dark room clings to its nurse.

"Let me carry her upstairs," said David hoarsely.

"Don't let him touch me," Daphne whispered.

"Go on ahead, and open the window over the sofa on the first landing," ordered Katherine briefly, "she can get as far as that."

In a few minutes it was all over, and Daphne safe in her room. David went into the smoking-room with Arthur Field. "You are a doctor," he said, "what do you make of a girl fainting like that?"

"It was a warm evening, she was over-tired—and her dress fitted her very well," said Arthur Field with a laugh.

"I don't believe that's true," said David, "she isn't that kind of girl."

"Pooh!" said the doctor irritably, "they're all that kind of girl!" David poured himself out a stiff glass of whisky and soda. The surgeon watched his hand as he poured it out. "And we're most of us that kind of man," he added unconcernedly. David grew very red.

Two hours later (it was nearly twelve), Lady Cheston opened the smoking-room door. The surgeon had gone to bed. " Where's my Reggie ? " she cried, shaking her finger at David.

" I don't know—where—the devil—your Reggie is ! " said the man at the table.

Lady Cheston gave a scream of laughter. " David ! " she said, " you're drunk ! "

" Damn you ! " he shouted, " what if I am ? "

" Oh ! you'd better go to bed," said Lady Cheston, " if you can get there," she added, still laughing.

Reggie came behind her. " What are you doing, mother ? " he asked very rudely.

" My sweet pet, I was looking for you," said his mother.

" Well ! now you see me," said her sweet pet rather crossly, " you had better go upstairs."

His mother followed his advice and ran laughing into Lady Middleton's room. " My dearest Vera," she said, " who's going to marry Daphne ? "

" Oh ! don't you know ? she's going to marry David Grey, that's been going on for a long while," said her hostess calmly.

Lady Cheston smiled. " My dear—the boy drinks ! " she said.

" Well ! there's the butler," said Lady Middleton vaguely, " and he can be hypnotized, you know.

There's always something wrong with some of them."

"Well! his *pockets* are all right," said Lady Cheston with emphasis.

"O, yes, dear! perhaps they are," said Lady Middleton, ringing for her maid, "but I never believe in anybody marrying for money, you know. Have you everything you want, darling? I *hope* so, good-night!"

Lady Cheston went to her room, but she did not go to sleep for a long time. Downstairs Reggie and the American were helping David Grey to bed. Katherine sat at Daphne's bed-side by the open window, looking out into the night. The sky was full of stars.

CHAPTER XI.

"The Moving Finger writes; and having writ
Moves on, nor all thy piety, nor all thy wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy tears, wash out a word of it."
"Rubaiyat."

It was four o'clock in the morning, and across the grey of the sky, a dawn rush of rain, passed before the windows to glance over the garden, and vanish in the fields. A chill wind, following after, shook the trees, and bird after bird awoke, to call out sleepily to each other, that it was time for the earliest of them to seek his worm.

"Katherine, are you awake?" said Daphne quietly.

Katherine was by her side in an instant. "What is it? I am awake," she said, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"Oh, you must be angry with me!" said Daphne.

"For waking me up?"

"For not telling you, Katherine."

"You are going to tell me, then?" said Katherine throwing a blanket around her, and sitting by her friend's bed-side.

"I have been telling you all night long, I think," said Daphne. "Now I have no words left. The morning is coming into the room, isn't it? Oh, Katherine, I am afraid of the morning!"

"But you are not afraid of me," said Katherine quietly. Daphne drew in a long breath. Katherine took both her hands with the same protecting gesture that the American had used the night before, and then it seemed easier for Daphne to speak.

"I loved my father so," she began. "My mother died when I was born, and he taught me everything I know, I was with him always, constantly, till I was sixteen, then he married Vera. He knew nothing at all about women, he thought they were all angels, and that the lovelier they were, the better their characters must be. Poor father! that was not very much to know, was it? He seemed to begin at the wrong end. Vera said she loved me, and he was beginning to find there were some things hard to teach a daughter. He never would let me have a governess, or any companion of that sort, and Vera's daughter, Lily, was a great friend of mine. He thought it would make us all very happy, and at first it seemed to, I was so fond of Lily, and Vera was very kind, and she taught me things I didn't know. I think she must have taught me all wrong, for I grew most unhappy, and father and I seemed separated. Then Lily married. I must go quickly over this part, Katherine, it was so very terrible. I saw her only once afterwards, alone, and she asked me if I thought it was wrong to wish to kill one's mother, because she did, and she begged me never to leave them together. I was very, very angry, and I came home, and said awful things to Vera. I couldn't tell father, so she made up lies about me, and asked him to go away for a time, and he did. Katherine, dear, how fast the morning is coming into the room. There seems very little air."

"The window is wide open," said Katherine, "can't you hear the birds? Look! how the curtains blow."

"They look as if they were shivering," said Daphne; "you won't leave go of my hands, promise me?"

"I won't leave go of them," said Katherine.

"Well, then——" Daphne went on, "Vera met Arthur Field, he was not such a great surgeon then, but she seems to have taken a fancy to him, and when I sprained my wrist, she asked him to come and see me. He came very often, far more often than he need. I was only sixteen, Katherine, she should not have let him come! She wanted him to influence me, she was terribly jealous of my father. It was only too easy. Arthur was so clever, so very clever! and so gentle. Men should never be clever and gentle too, I think, unless they are very good. Arthur was not good, he wanted me to marry him, and he had a wife, a dreadful woman who drank, somewhere a long way off I think. Vera was the only person who knew about it, they neither of them told me. Then father came back, and he disliked Arthur and would not let me see him, and oh, Katherine, I used to! Vera never knew, father allowed me perfect freedom. I hated myself for going, but I used to go! Of course, Vera never meant it to go on so far, she thought it would take my love away from father, that we should cease to trust each other, and that she would get a hold over me by threatening to tell him about some letters of Arthur's she had discovered, I don't know how! If I had been older, I should have told him everything! Oh, how I wanted to! I used to cry all night sometimes, I was so ashamed! One day I went to his study to tell him. I went on my knees beside him, and he kissed me. 'Look, my darling,' he said, 'here is such a lovely photograph of Vera!' Oh, Katherine, Katherine, it nearly broke my heart! I never answered him, I got up and went out of the room. He called me back, but I never went. I never tried to tell him again. Arthur wanted to marry me secretly, but I said 'No' twenty times I think, then I said 'Yes!'"

"You should not have said 'no' twenty times, you should have said it once," said Katherine.

"I must have some air," said Daphne.

Together they went to the open window, and Daphne looked out over the misty fields. The sun behind the hills broke into glory, like a great red rose, scattering pink petals over the sky.

"It is five o'clock," said Katherine.

"And the worst of it was," said Daphne kneeling by the open window, "I was not sure that I loved him, only sometimes I did. I was terribly afraid of him. I couldn't stop his marrying me if he wished to, but oh, I did so wish someone else to! I suppose it was this that drove me into telling Vera one night, what I was going to do. I hoped she would tell my father, but she didn't. She turned on me and said that I might go to him if I liked, but that he was married already.

"Then she got frightened and cried, and begged me to forgive her. She said she had never meant to deceive me, never dreamt that we really cared for each other, that it was all a dreadful mistake, and that if I would only not tell my father, she would do anything that I wanted, anything in the world! Of course I wrote and told Arthur that I would never see him again, and he came, and I did. Katherine, I don't think I can tell you any more."

"Oh, yes, you can," said Katherine taking her in her arms. "Now you must tell me everything."

"I begged him to let me alone, because of his wife; he said that he was free. I suppose men always are more or less, aren't they, unless they happen to be good? But I said I wasn't. Finally he agreed that I was very young to make such a big choice, and he promised me my freedom for three years, till I was nineteen. His wife might be dead by that time, and if not, I said that—— Oh, how horrible this light is, Katherine!"

"Hide your head on my shoulder," said Katherine, "then you won't see."

"I said that—it should be as he wished, but I didn't mean it, I meant to get engaged to somebody else. Then Vera came in, and he frightened her to death, and she promised him to let him see me at the end of three years, and not to tell. After he went, she said I must marry David, and I said I would, only to let me have my three years first. They seemed to go so quickly, Katherine, as quickly as the light came up over the hills just now. I never saw Arthur. He became famous and took up hypnotism, and father died. Katherine, he never knew. I thought it would kill me, but of course it didn't. Sometimes it strikes me that to die, is almost as difficult as to love, only more final. When Arthur heard that father was dead, he came back, and Vera took him up tremendously, you see he was so famous, he was a great catch. And I came here to Uncle Wilfred. I think that's all, except last night I accepted David Grey, it was the only way out of it. Arthur has as much power over me as ever, and the wife's alive. Those kind of people don't die you know, I told him that before." Daphne began to laugh. Katherine walked up and down the room, it was terrible to hear Daphne laughing.

"The beauty of it is," said Daphne between her sobs of laughter, "that Arthur told me he hated women to be cynical! Don't you think men are very wonderful?"

"I think they are beasts!" said Katherine. "Beasts!"

"Oh, no!" said Daphne with a quick smile, "only a little lower than the angels, Katherine, a little lower, and you and I would rather have them, dearest, than the angels, any day, because we are women."

"And what do you suppose a woman is?" said Katherine savagely.

"One finds it all in Genesis," said Daphne a little wearily. "She was tempted by the serpent. (Let's go to bed, Katherine dear.) And she handed the temptation on, so perhaps there's not so very much to choose between us, after all." The sun was fully up now, even the latest of the birds had had his breakfast, and was singing his Choral Celebration on the lawn.

"I am going to have a cold bath," said Katherine, "and then I am going out for a walk."

"You will terrify the housemaids," said Daphne sleepily, "but it's very like you, dear. Those are the kind of things I want to do, and can't."

"You can do a great many other things though," said Katherine a little grimly.

CHAPTER XII.

"Alas, that the longest hill
Must end in a vale; but still
Who climbs with toil, whereso'er
Shall find wings waiting there."
H. C. BEECHING.

"IT does seem right natural to see you here," said Bert Russell. He himself had been up and out at six o'clock, and finding even the large garden too restricted for him, had passed out into the fields. It was here that, an hour later, he met Katherine; she seemed the very spirit, and freshness of the morning.

"I don't see why!" said Katherine a little ungraciously. He was the last person she had expected, or wanted to see.

"There was a kind of goddess, I seem to remember," he said, "who came out of the earth with the spring, bringing flowers in her hand, didn't she? And the earth was ever so glad to see her. It broke right out into summer, and everything that was down below came up to have a look at her. It must have been pretty poor fun down below, I guess, after she'd gone."

Katherine frowned impatiently. “I came here to be alone,” she said.

“Why, so did I,” he replied, “but I'm ever so glad it didn't happen; still, if you want it to, I'll go right away.”

Katherine looked at him and found that, without her knowledge, or even her wish, he was telling her something. He had tremendously taking silences. The articulate seemed only the ripple, to cover the expression of an infinite number of other things that went on below; and it seemed to her that what he was trying to express, was something very kind and friendly indeed, and something of a help to her, but she would not listen.

“Thank you,” she said, “I want to be alone.”

“May I ask you a question before I go?” he said quite gravely, and with his bright, kind eyes still on hers.

“Yes,” said Katherine.

If I can be of any use to you or to Miss Daphne, will you let me be?” he said.

“I should like you to tell me what sort of a man David Grey is?” said Katherine thoughtfully.

“Well, I think he's a very good sort of fellow,” said Bert Russell, “in the smoking-room.”

“Thank you,” said Katherine. They stood for a moment silent. “But you wouldn't like him to marry your sister?” Katherine continued.

"Why, you're asking me some very hard questions," he said at last.

"I am not asking them for fun," she said impatiently, "nor because I want to talk to you!"

"Oh, no!" said Bert Russell with a whimsical smile, "I wasn't expecting an encore, Miss Linton, but no one likes taking a man's character away without good reason."

"I have a good reason," said Katherine.

"Then I would be quite willing for Grey to marry my sister if she were a barmaid, and I didn't have to support them both afterwards," he said.

"That's all I wanted to know," said Katherine.

"Then I'll go out into the cold, cold world, to seek my fortune," he said lifting his hat to her, "but before I go, perhaps you'll let me say that this grass is the wettest thing out, and that I hope you've got thick shoes on."

"I haven't got any shoes on at all," she replied briefly, "nor stockings," she added as an afterthought.

"Well, it must feel good," said Bert Russell cordially, and he left her.

Katherine waited till he was out of sight, then she swung herself on to a stile, and sat for an hour thinking about Daphne. She had a simple soul and saw things very much as they are. The consequence was, she made fewer mistakes than most people, and had never felt afraid. She did not feel afraid now, but she was puzzled. It struck her that Daphne, for whom she meant to do things, would not like the things she meant to do, and yet she meant to do them all the same.

Katherine loved Daphne, with all the love in her heart. She did not think that Daphne had behaved well, but that did not make the slightest difference. If Daphne had behaved far worse, Katherine would have acted on the same basis, but she would have suffered a good deal more.

The American wandered back into the park again, he found himself very much amused with Katherine, American girls do not take their shoes and stockings off, to go into wet fields, nor could they have told him they had done so, with such calm eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

" So free we seem, so fettered fast we are."—ROBERT BROWNING.

KATHERINE could scarcely believe her eyes when, on entering the large dining-room, she saw Daphne seated opposite Arthur Field, and beside David Grey. Daphne, who was afraid of the morning when she had merely to tell her story, facing her life now with an air, as fearless as it was charming, and with an appetite, which seemed not averse to strawberries and cream, with which Reggie had plentifully heaped her plate.

" Daphne tells me you have been out, dear," said Lady Middleton, smiling at her, and wondering what her name was. "*So* clever of *you*! I have always *wanted* to get up early, *really* early you know, and go out into the fields to see the dawn, and *mushrooms*. It *is* mushrooms, isn't it, that one finds there? Only I hate upsetting my maid, and one must have one's hair done. It is so easy to upset one's maid."

" It is quite easy to do one's own hair," said Daphne.

Katherine said nothing. To Lady Middleton's casual absurdities, this wall of silence was exceedingly difficult. She wished Daphne would not have such awkward friends, it made one feel ridiculous, which was bad, or serious, which was worse. Lady Middleton gave a little friendly laugh, and glanced over the table. "Now we are all here," she said, "aren't we? And I've got a lovely piece of news to give you. I feel quite 'beautiful upon the mountains.' What do you think it is?" Katherine felt the toast in her hand crumble. She glanced over the faces at the table. Arthur Field looked up enquiringly. David looked down on his plate morosely. Lady Cheston looked at David. The twins both clapped their hands. Reggie was cutting ham at the sideboard. Daphne, with quite a steady hand, poured more cream over her strawberries. "Our dear Daphne," said Lady Middleton, "and our dear David, are going to make each other happy."

"Oh! but that's taking rather a lot for granted, Vera!" said Daphne, putting down the cream jug.

Lady Cheston gave a little shriek of laughter, rushed round the table, pecked at Daphne's cheek, and pulled one of David's curls. The twins exclaimed in joyous surprise, "Oh, Daphne! Oh, David! how awfully lovely!" This covered up the fact that the rest of the party said nothing.

Arthur Field, after one swift glance at Daphne, grew white to the lips. Katherine knew that she was very angry, and looked it. Reggie stopped cutting ham.

Vera leant back in her chair satisfied. There had been reasons why she and Lady Cheston were not very fond of each other, and now Vera was quite ready to forgive and forget.

"Well," said Daphne, "I think it's frightful to have these things talked about at breakfast, if it had been dinner now, you could have all drunk my health, and David could have got up and thanked you. Couldn't you, David? The next time, Vera, that you have good tidings please announce them upon the mountains, a dining-room is so crowded."

"She takes it very coolly," said Lady Cheston, in an aside to Bert Russell.

"Why, I don't see what there is for her to throw bouquets about," he said. "In my country we only congratulate the young men."

"She'll have £30,000 a year," said Lady Cheston.

"You don't say!" he replied coolly, and then added, "you forget she'll have him."

"Oh, no! I don't forget that!" said Lady Cheston.

"I say," began Reggie, doubtfully, "it won't stop our fishing this morning, will it?"

"Daphne needn't go," said Lady Cheston sweetly.

"I am going to see my uncle," said Daphne quietly.

Lady Middleton looked a little anxiously at Arthur Field. "I am going to adopt you for this morning," she said genially. "There is so much I want to learn. We will fish farther up the stream where we can be away from all the others."

"Mother," said Reggie, "you can't fish you know, you'd only laugh. You'd better stay here and amuse David, unless he's going with Daphne."

"Oh, no! he's not going with me," said Daphne quickly.

David bit his lip. "It seems to me you chaps are trying to arrange too much," he said.

Reggie paid no attention. "Miss Linton knows all the best places," he went on, "she's going to take me, and the twins will go with Bert. You'll take them won't you, Bert?"

"Why, I should be only too happy," said the American smiling kindly at the girls.

"Yes, you'd probably be *too* happy!" shouted Lady Cheston, "if you're takin' them both!"

"Well!" said Lady Middleton, smiling pleasantly, "it's very sweet of you to plan things out for yourselves. Lunch will be brought out to the hollow place beyond the bridge, if it's fine you know, and really, it does seem," said Lady Middleton going to the window and glancing out over the lawn, "as if it *would* be fine!" She looked at the sky with a shade of warning. "I shall be exceedingly annoyed," she added, "if it is not."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Love's throne was not with these ; but far above
All passionate wind of welcome or farewell
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of,
Though Truth foreknow Love's Heart, and Hope foretell,
And Fame be for Love's Sake desirable,
And youth be dear, and Life be Sweet to Love."

ROSETTI.

"YOUR uncle is out," said Mrs. Fordington. She was dressed in a long pink over-all, and was superintending the gardening. "He has gone to a clerical meeting, he will probably only get a cold lunch, and make himself ill with smoking. I am very busy indeed with some new chickens, would you like to come and see them? They have to be fed every two hours you know, and they are a particularly delicate sort, needing constant attention."

"Where is Dora?" asked Daphne listlessly, as she followed her aunt towards the poultry yard.

"Oh, Dora? I really don't quite know what to do with Dora this afternoon," said her aunt poking a recalcitrant hen with the tip of her rake; "you see her father lets her do so few lessons, and Marie does most of my dressmaking, and can't be always attending to her, I quite miss you. I have my Parish Magazines to deliver, and a Temperance League address to prepare. I suppose you could scarcely take her back to Lady Middleton's, her father would call for her after tea?"

"Do let me," said Daphne eagerly, "I am sure Vera wouldn't mind. The little chickens are so pretty," she added. She felt her eyes filling with foolish tears, as they rested on the little innocent balls of fluff, and their eager, agitated mother.

Spring seemed to teach her to yearn for love. Birds love that sings, flowers love that glows, earth's love rich in increase, the sea's love infinite in depth. Man's love alone seemed out of place in the scheme of beauty, for where it most would soar, it falls most pitifully. So Daphne thought, knowing in her own heart that the battle she was fighting against her love would be sweetest to her in defeat.

"I am not sure," said her aunt looking at them with a keen, experienced eye, "that they will turn out satisfactorily." Daphne gave a little hysterical laugh. Her aunt glanced at her sharply. "You want some milk," she said; "you have been walking too fast in the heat. It is a pity you are so impulsive, Daphne."

An hour later Dora and Daphne set off, hand in hand, radiant with youth and happiness.

"I fink," said Dora, "we *might* find a waterfall, don't you, Cousin Daphne?"

"What should we do with it if we found it, sweet?"

"Oh! we'd go there, often and often," said Dora happily, "and there would be ferns, and we could take our shoes and stockings off, and it would make ever'n and ever'n so much more noise, than both the bath-room taps."

"And a prince with ever such long, golden hair," suggested Daphne, "would come out of the wood and take us in a little boat——"

"A *safe* little boat?" interrupted Dora anxiously.

"Oh! ever such a safe boat," laughed Daphne, "right down the stream, on and on through woods and dales, all down to the sea, and then we could paddle all day long, and he could find us shells——"

"And seaweed?" chanted Dora.

"Red seaweed!" exclaimed the triumphant Daphne.

A shadow came over Dora's face. "If the prince wouldn't mind *very* much," she said politely, "I fink I should like to find *some* of the shells myself, Cousin Daphne."

"You should find a great many *more* than the prince could," said Daphne with emphasis, "and all the seaweed."

Dora's eyes shone with delight. "And would there be room for father in the boat?" she cried.

"Yes," said Daphne growing a little thoughtful, "there would be plenty of room for father." At this moment they came out of the shadows of the trees and met face to face with a tall man whom Daphne seemed to know.

"Is this the prince?" whispered Dora pulling at her hand. "Oh! Cousin Daphne, how cold your hands are."

Daphne drew the child closer to her side. "He has no golden hair," she whispered. Then she looked up at him. "What do you want with me—Arthur?" she said. He looked at her with haggard eyes. All that day he had been fighting with his future and hers. He knew that the issue lay in his hands, and he had lived all his life among great issues, and so he was afraid.

It is only the ignorant and inexperienced who dare to throw down their challenge to fortune, and stake a smile against the world. They are audacious because they are blind, and assured because they do not know. Those who have lived longer, tremble more and dare less, and when they dare they achieve.

"I cannot tell what I mean to do," said Arthur, "but I am very sure about what you are not to do. You are not to marry a man you do not love. I am not sentimental, I have always dealt with facts, and marriage where there is no love is an unpleasant fact. I cannot let you face this, Daphne. I suppose that in some mad moment of panic, after you left me last night, you gave an answer to the very man you refused to admit you meant to marry. I cannot believe that you meant to lie to me. Will you tell me why you did it?"

"You would not let me go," said Daphne. Her breath came fast, and she could not meet his eyes. "So I took the one way out." There seemed in the soft summer stillness, an almost audible clash of human wills, and human passions. The quiet wood, at full noonday heat, and peace, became a battle-field, a place to fear, and to escape from. Dora began to cry.

"This is not the right place for a child," said Arthur sternly. With a sudden movement he bent forward, and took the child up in his arms. He carried her, still crying with fright, further in among the trees, then he came back to Daphne.

"Now," he said, "be honest! For once in our lives let us face truth and abide by it. Forget that you are a well-brought-up member, of the upper-middle-classes, and come back to your elemental womanhood. You have given me to understand that you love me. Love is not a gentle preference for a suitable person, it is a very real thing, and it is quite true I am an unsuitable person. The question is, have you really this love for me?" Daphne felt that terrible struggle to evade, which is at once the curse and the defence of Eve's daughters.

"I care—for you, Arthur," she said slowly.

"What do you mean by '*care?*'" he asked impatiently.

"I would have married you if—if it had been possible!" she pleaded.

"Who is to say it is impossible?" he asked her scornfully. "Protesting is not my forte, but you know that I have loved you against my wish, my will, against my reason, against everything that is transitory and easy to assume! I love you so that I cannot work, or think or live without you, as well as I could work, and think, and live for you! You rob me of the best that is in me, if you withhold what you have already pledged to me in words! And you? Is it for your advantage that you should marry a man you neither love nor really know? Will you go out into the dark, without even the safeguard of a true emotion? Whose ultimate good can you hope to gain by such an experiment, an experiment that you will not be able to escape from when it fails? Are you entirely blind to the probable consequences of such a step and its almost inevitable conclusion?"

Daphne shivered before the torrent of his words, and she was not quite satisfied with his protestation. She would so much rather have had him say, that he could not live without her at all, than that he could live better with her.

"Don't you see," she tried to explain, "that it is less wrong for me to suffer, even the failure of an experiment, than to succeed in a wrong experiment? It is because I should be so happy with you, because we should be deceiving the world, that I cannot do this! Can people be rightly happy whose whole life is based on a lie?"

"The foundation of our life would not be a lie," he said. "The merest barrier of convention, a law of man which cannot reach our hearts, *this* indeed we should ignore; but there is no deception in ignoring what does not concern us. Love and our work, and the life we can lead together, it is to this you must listen, and if you listen to this, the voice of your scruples will be dumb."

Daphne fell back on her last line of defences; they were her defences, but they were not the truth; she was giving him every reason in the world—instead of the real one—and yet behind the feebleness of her weapons she knew her spirit was right, while behind the strongest of his passionate reasons she felt him to be in the wrong. "I have promised David," she said.

"You promised me before you ever promised David!" he cried.

"Will you never stop loving me?" she asked, pleading for the reward of virtue, not the wages of sin. Arthur smiled.

"There are some things you will have to take for granted," he said, "meanwhile I am quite able to look after my own interests and yours. I give you one week to think over what I have said to you, and to dismiss your rather weak excuse. You will grant he is rather weak?"

"I have granted so much!" said Daphne.

"That is it," he said, "you have granted so much, that there is nothing left, but for you to grant it all. I am sorry you made this blunder, it will cause you pain. It has done so already I fear, and I want to save you from all the trouble I can."

The keen look faded from his eyes, and they grew tender as he glanced at the slight figure of the girl—a smile began to quiver about his mouth—after all he was a little like other men, she thought.

But without another word he turned and left her. For a few moments Daphne stood quite still. She knew enough about men to understand, that there was one argument, generally very efficacious, that Arthur had never used with her. The nearest he had ever come to it was when he had taken her by the shoulders, and even then he had merely shaken her, as he would have done a perverse child, and let her go. She knew that he would not permit an emotional surrender, and that was the only one she felt as if she could have made. The colour came into her face, and frowning, she turned back into the trees to find Dora. She passed in among the trees until she saw the child's figure; as she came towards her, a twig snapped, Dora turned with a terrible little cry, and fell forward on her face.

CHAPTER XV.

"Our Lord Himself cannot make the wheel swing backward."
RUDYARD KIPLING.

DAPHNE felt wildly for the child's heart, she would have called Arthur back, but her voice failed her, and a great anger against the man who had unwittingly caused the child's terror took possession of her. She felt that she would never call him back again even if it left her in the world alone.

"I say, what's up?" sounded a friendly voice beside her. "I thought I heard some kind of a row. Has the child fainted?"

"Oh! Reggie, I am so glad to see you!" cried Daphne. "It is the heat! I should not have brought her out! I am quite sure it is the heat!"

"Yes," said Reggie, who was of the opinion that the important point was not so much what *had* happened, as what could be done to remedy it. "Shall I take her to the stream?" He picked the child up and carried her through the trees to the water's edge, where, in a few moments, she opened her eyes.

"I fink," she whispered, "this is the prince—Daphne? And oh, look, Daphne, all the rest is true?" Daphne and Reggie looked up the stream, to where the child was pointing. At the head of a little glade some hundred yards away was a waterfall.

"It's awfully pretty here, isn't it?" said Reggie. "I'm awfully glad I found you." Daphne had recovered herself by now.

"Where are the others?" she asked. Reggie's face fell. It mattered exceedingly little to him where the others were, provided that they remained there.

"The twins are down the stream with Miss Linton and Bert Russell," he explained, "and I think David is with my mother. You'd better stay here, hadn't you, and I'll bring you some lunch, then you can drive back."

"Bring Miss Linton as well as the lunch," said Daphne.

"It seems to me I like London better than the country," Reggie ventured.

"I hope you will do as I ask," said Daphne gravely.

"I think you know I will, Daphne," he replied, with an earnestness not altogether as boyish as she would have liked to believe. Then he remembered David, and bit his lips to keep the words back. He knew that there was a mistake somewhere, but he could not set it right. David was his friend, and Daphne was very much more than his friend, so for a moment he was silent. "Wasn't there someone in the wood with you?" he asked finally. "I thought I heard a man's voice before this young lady distinguished herself."

"How did I distinguish myself?" Dora asked with interest.

"The way people usually do," said Reggie with a chuckle, "by making a row!" Daphne looked up at him, and for a moment she hesitated, but there was something in the absolute friendly honesty of his eyes that made it impossible for her to lie to him.

"Mr. Field was with me," she said, "for a few minutes. I was looking for Dora afterwards, when she cried and fainted."

"What was I like when I fainted?" asked Dora with shining eyes. "There was an old lady who fainted in church once, and her bonnet fell over into our pew," she went on, "but mother wouldn't let me pick it up."

"You were very much like you are now," said Reggie, "only quieter. I didn't know you knew that surgeon chap," he said to Daphne, throwing a pebble into the stream with obvious irritability. "I don't think much of him."

"Oh! I suppose he can't fish," said Daphne. "Are we going to get any lunch?" Reggie accepted his rebuke, and went on his errand.

"He hasn't got golden hair," said Dora in some disappointment, "and he doesn't say sensible things, but he has a prince's eyes I fink, don't you?"

"Yes, I think he has," said Daphne.

"What happened to that dreadful other man?" Dora asked looking round her fearfully.

"Oh, he was only a pretend man," said Daphne soothingly. "He has quite gone away, we only *thought* we saw him."

"I am so glad he isn't real," said Dora happily. But it was a *horrid* thought."

Daphne took Dora's hands in hers and kissed them passionately. "We will never have any more horrid thoughts," she said.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Truth is a strong thing—let man's life be true."
ROBERT BROWNING.

CONFUSION reigned over the picnic party. In spite of Lady Middleton's hint to Providence it had begun to pour. Black soft rain-clouds covered up the sun. The trees themselves proved little shelter from the deluge, and it was very unbecoming. Katherine knew a short cut home, and by this she conducted Daphne, Dora, and the young American, leaving the twins to drive in a tiny brougham with Lady Cheston, whose face was a daring spectacle of rouge and rivulets, and Lady Middleton, who was (as she had said she would be in the event of its raining) exceedingly annoyed. It was suggested that Dora should be taken with them, but both Vera and Lady Cheston said that it was absurd, and that there was no room. The twins at once offered to walk, but Lady Cheston's eyes sharply reminded them that she had paid for their dresses.

Reggie and David (who had broken through the arrangement made for him) walked home together.

"Do you think I'm a brute?" David asked his friend à propos of nothing, as they trudged on through the mud.

"Does she know?" Reggie asked.

"Know? Know what?" shouted David angrily, stopping in the middle of the lane.

"I say, come on home," said Reggie, "I'm getting fairly wet. I mean, does Daphne know your little weakness?"

"Damn my little weakness!" said David gloomily.

"That's right, do!" said Reggie cheerfully. "Then you won't need to tell her."

"Who talks about telling her? Do you suppose a girl like Daphne would ever speak to me again if she knew I got drunk like a beast?" David asked.

"Not like a beast," said Reggie soothingly. "Beasts don't! Like a man."

"Oh, hang your distinctions," David muttered, "you might help a fellow, Reggie."

"If I were you, I should tell her," said Reggie, "you wouldn't like it, to get to her from any other quarter."

David shot a quick glance at him. Reggie's face was a pleasant blank. "Do you suppose," said David, "it would be likely to?"

"I shouldn't take the risk myself," said Reggie.

"I don't believe she cares for me," said David.

"Then you *must* tell her," said Reggie.

"Oh, confound your *must*," growled David, "I don't believe you know what it is to care for a girl like Daphne. She isn't like the usual sort of London girl. I wouldn't look at any of 'em. Innocent-faced, scheming-hearted little foxes! Bound to try for a man or get sent to grass in the country while the younger ones are coming out! Daphne is—is different, I can't explain——"

"Don't try," said Reggie briefly, "I know."

"What do you know?" David asked suspiciously.

"Why—that you're a silly old ass!" laughed Reggie. They became silent after Reggie's confession of knowledge, and trudged on through heavy rain, regardless of the beautiful young world of green drinking in life around them. It was not until they reached the park gates that Reggie spoke again. "You'll tell her, old man?" he said anxiously, "won't you?"

David frowned. "She'll never look at me again," he repeated. The sky began to clear. Spaces of blue broke through the blackness overhead. The sun catching the edges of the clouds set them on fire. Lady Middleton stood at the hall door. She was comfortable again and happy. Her maid had been very busy the last half-hour.

"My dear David," she said, "no Daphne? I left you to come home together?"

"Well, we've come home," said David with an unpleasant look, "separately."

"We're awfully wet," said Reggie apologetically, "we ought to have come in some other way."

"But such a lovely sky!" said Lady Middleton. "I so often wish I was a cloud!"

The remark that David contributed on clouds was fortunately lost, Lady Middleton went back into the drawing-room. She had hàd the fire lit. Arthur Field was there.

"Well!" she said rather briskly, "when are you going?"

"At the end of a week," he answered. "Who was that out there with you?"

"Reggie Cheston," said Lady Middleton, taking up some embroidery—it was always the same piece.

"There were two voices," he reminded her.

"Oh, the other was the young American!" said Lady Middleton.

Arthur Field opened a note-book of his next month's appointments. "I wonder," he said aloud, "why women always lie?"

"Because men are such brutes," said Lady Middleton viciously.

"Then you shouldn't lie to them," he said smiling. "they might take a brute's advantage."

"Well—some of them don't find out," said Lady Middleton.

"Then they might take a fool's advantage."

"What's that?" she asked quickly.

"I am not sure that I will tell you," he said, "sometimes it seems to me as if fools had *all* the advantages."

"I don't know what you mean," said Lady Middleton looking annoyed, "and I don't see how a fool could do any one harm."

"And yet there is a great deal of harm done," he reminded her, "and very few wise people."

Reggie went straight upstairs to his mother's room and knocked at the door. Lady Cheston opened it, and though she looked surprised at seeing him, she let him in. She shrieked when she saw his clothes. "Oh, Reggie! what a shocking mess you're in! What do *you* want to come and drip about my room for?"

"All right, mother," said Reggie, "I'm not doing any harm. Look here! I don't want you to meddle in this affair."

His mother looked at him keenly. "What affair?" she asked, shutting her lips tight.

"Between Daphne and David," said Reggie. "If any tales are told, or any change in their relations takes place while you are under this roof, I cut down your allowance. What you do afterwards I can't trace, though if I find out that you have been interfering in any way, I shall be forced to take unpleasant measures. Do you quite understand?"

Lady Cheston tapped her foot on the carpet, an angry pulse beat in her cheek, but she was holding herself in. "I don't see what difference it makes to you!" she said, "unless you think that although you can't get her now, after she's married David——"

"Mother!"

Lady Cheston checked the words on her lips. She was not easily frightened, but there were times when Reggie could silence her. "Well," she said, "people do those things, Reggie, but I'm sure I'm sorry if I've made you angry. It isn't a good look out for Daphne, and I did mention it last night to Vera. However, she knew already, and she's not likely to tell Daphne—you remember the Lil Courteny episode? So you ought to be satisfied. Are you still angry?" she asked. There was something almost timid in her appeal to him, he was her only son, and all that was good in her centred around the thought of that.

"No, mother," he said, "I'm merely disgusted, and I'm quite used to that you know. You'll remember about the money?"

Lady Cheston's eyes hardened. "Oh, yes, Reggie!" she said, "trust me to remember that!" and he left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Who rowing hard against the stream
Saw distant gates of Eden gleam,
And did not dream it was a dream."
ALFRED TENNYSON.

"THE child is really ill," said Katherine, "I don't think there is any doubt of it, what with the heat, the fainting fit you mention, and a wetting afterwards, it is not to be wondered at."

"Oh! I must keep her! I must look after her!" cried Daphne. "Aunt Emma——" she stopped abruptly.

"You can leave her out," said Katherine, "she is out so often." The child lay shivering and burning on Daphne's bed. The two girls talked in low tones by the window.

"I cannot face Uncle Wilfred," said Daphne, "it is my carelessness!"

"Whatever it is," said Katherine, "the child is ill—we must have a doctor." She looked at Daphne. "There is one in the house," she added.

"Don't—don't let him see her!" cried Daphne.

"Why not?" asked Katherine sharply.

"She has seen him already," whispered Daphne, "I meant to have told you——"

"Oh, no! you didn't!" interrupted Katherine.

"He frightened her—in the wood—send for some one else! Go and ask Bert," Daphne pleaded, "don't tell anyone!" Katherine hesitated, feeling unaccountably shy. Then she grew angry with herself and hurried out of the room.

Bert Russell was in the drawing-room giving the twins their tea. They were explaining to him, with little bursts of laughter, how sandwiches were made.

"I want to speak to you," said Katherine bluntly. There was a shocked pause. Lady Cheston raised her eyebrows at Vera—who shrugged her shoulders as an equivalent answer, and a shifting of responsibility.

"Why, that's good," said Bert Russell, springing to his feet. "But I only receive lectures in private, and I can tell by your tone it's going to be a lecture, Miss Linton. Take me away where the rest won't hear."

Katherine answered nothing. She led the way into the conservatory. The rain and the wind had blown her hair about (it was generally too tidy) and her embarrassment was making the colour in her cheeks a delight to the eyes. Bert Russell took it all in appreciatively. Then his light manner completely forsook him—he saw that she was upset at the consequence of her abruptness in the drawing-room, and that she did not quite know what to say.

"I guess you want me?" he said with a genial alertness.

"Dora is ill," said Katherine, "fever and a cough—and some nervous shock, I think—— She ought to see a doctor," she added in a gentle tone, "and Mr. Fordington ought not to come here till then."

"I'll just drop round and see him on the way from the doctor's," Bert Russell said.

"How do you know where the doctor lives?" Katherine asked.

"Well, I guess I could have found out even if I hadn't happened to pass his house this morning," smiled Bert. "Have you any other things you want me to tell you, Miss Linton?"

Katherine turned on her heel. "No!" she said, "I'm telling you this for Daphne."

"That's real good in you," said Bert Russell. Katherine went out of the conservatory. It is a pity, but she certainly did—bang the door after her. The American whistled and put his hands in his pockets. When he stopped whistling he began to smile, but he got very quickly to the doctor's.

He apologized for calling at The Vicarage unintroduced, but he explained to Mr. Fordington that, as an American, and he was afraid, of no fixed denomination, he was very much interested in the English Church, and very curious about it.

The Vicar gave him a warm welcome, he was preparing to go for Dora, but he re-seated himself in his study. "What is it you want to know about the Church?" he said.

The American smiled at his adroit evasion of the adjective. "Well!" he said, "if we had cathedrals, I guess they wouldn't be quite such lonely buildings. Your Church doesn't seem much of a social success either, it doesn't bring people together, and even your parsons fight each other half the time, and their flock the rest. It doesn't seem to me, you teach the same things. Here, I'm told that if I don't make my confession, I shall get cast off, and right in the next parish, the parson says, Auricular Confession is a kind of Devil's Diary. It doesn't seem to hang together. Then look at what you pay your ministers! An office boy would want to get more in our country or he'd chuck his job! Either they're worthy of their hire and oughtn't to be given pocket-money or they should be kicked out altogether. That's the way we seem to think it is, but I want to know your view of it from the inside. When I say things to what you call the laity, I'm told, 'Oh, that's broad church!' or 'They don't do those things in our parish,' and I can't seem to pin them down."

Mr. Fordington listened with grave attention. "Do you know what are the two hardest things to find in the world?" he asked, offering the American a pipe and lighting his own. Bert Russell shook his head. " A consistent Christian," said the Vicar, " and an unprejudiced observer. Keep that in your mind as the key-note to what I shall try to tell you. The Church," the Vicar went on, " is in some ways influenced by the English character. You know perhaps from your stay in the country, that the owners of the oldest and most famous of our great country seats live much of the year in town, and have shown an inclination to let their houses to rich Americans. I do not say this explains the cathedrals, only when you know that centuries ago they were there—and that coming centuries will still find them—you become less momentarily anxious to fill them, and yet you would never find them unoccupied even if they are rarely filled. I must confess that we lack a social system in connection with our Church, though I believe that more and more the spirit of unity is creeping in among us. We have far more social gatherings with the classes mixed, than in the old days would have seemed possible. You must remember that the Church is not the only power that finds class prejudice difficult to cope with, but I believe I am right in thinking that it is the only power that will be enabled to ultimately cope with it. I think that you are in great danger in your country of forgetting that the Church is primarily spiritual. She should never compromise with the world, nor seek to make her doctrines popular. What is truly Christian can never be popular."

"But why not, sir?" questioned the young man. "Surely you wouldn't shut the world out?"

"It is the world that shuts itself out," said the Vicar sadly. "'The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God.' Let him give up the world to find the Church. It is not the place of the Church to give up anything to attract the world. Her Master and Guide said indeed to His Disciples, 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' but he warned them at the same time not to lose their savour, and a bid for popularity is the destruction of the spiritual essence. 'Ye *cannot* serve God and Mammon,' and still less can we serve God by making religion easy to Mammon. The curse of modern times is, to my mind, the making things easy. We shudder too much at acquaintance with grief, and we would rather not hear about a man of sorrows. We will gladly cry Hosanna after a miracle, and when we have the crowd with us, but if He turns commerce out of our temples and strips from us the external and the material, the barriers we have put up of comfort, and of custom, and calls upon us to deny our *selves*, to take up a cross, and to follow —quite a poor person, it becomes almost a necessity to cry crucify Him! Or perhaps in more modern language, 'Ignore Him! give us back the law! The satisfaction in being as other men are! Let the external do our religion for us! The Christ asks too much!' Alas!" said the Vicar, gazing sadly out of his study window, "we are willing to give so little!

We have not 'resisted unto death,' we have not even perhaps resisted unto inconvenience. And when anybody wakes up to the claims of the Cross—we say, 'he goes too far.'"

Bert Russell became conscious that he was talking to a really good man. A thing that had rarely happened to him. "But the Church?" he said gently, "and its inconsistencies, surely if it showed a more Christ-like spirit to the world——" he hesitated. The pain in the Vicar's face made him pause. "If we were better Christians there would be *more* Christians?" he questioned.

"Yes—yes, that is our great Rebuke, yet you must not blame the Church for the frailties of her members. She is inviolate! If we but obeyed her precepts we should have 'shown forth Christ—and Him crucified.'" The Vicar's head was bowed for a moment as if the reproach had overwhelmed him with a personal shame, and Bert Russell watching him, wondered why the innocent should always know Remorse, so much more heavily, and with so much greater intensity than those who had caused the evil.

The Vicar raised his head. "It is our life that is at fault," he said almost with passion, "never our Faith! The Apostles' creed is so very simple, so clear, and so, I venture to believe, truly primitive, that I may not be wrong in holding it up as our mirror of truth, our home of dogma, and our real consistency! I take it that all who use these words in their most obvious meaning, belong to the Church of God, and I hold that all who cannot honestly believe and take these words as their Standard of Christian Faith have no room in the Church. Beyond the simple creed, there are many deep and important questions on which great and good men will always differ, but I trust that these differences, grave as they seem, will not exclude the believers in them from the same Heaven. I venture to think that in another life they will understand each other a great deal better, and when we understand people, it is but a short step towards understanding their views and assimilating the portion of Truth that is almost always enfolded in them. The Church and Truth are alike in this—in one question you can challenge either—but it would take many answers to barely outline the spirit of each, and the answers would seem self-contradictory and inconsistent, for you cannot see all around either of them. In the long run you will realize that the Church is large enough to be inclusive even of extremes and strong enough to be tolerant of them."

"Thank you," said the American.

Mr. Fordington smiled. "I fear I have wearied you," he said, "and I have given you but an inadequate answer. The longer you live the more difficult you will find it to put things into Black and White, the prevailing shade is grey. We are mixed, you know, very mixed!"

"Why, yes!" said Bert, "we can't even be angry without laughing up our sleeve, and when we love people, we would rather deprive them of their other loves."

"Perhaps you will walk back with me?" said Mr. Fordington. "I must fetch my little girl."

"Miss Daphne asked me to tell you, sir," said the American, taking out an old volume from the Vicar's shelf, "that as your daughter was a little tired with her walk, she would keep her over night and bring her back to-morrow herself."

"That was thoughtful of Daphne," said the Vicar, "very thoughtful, and most kind of Lady Middleton to keep her." He looked rather anxious. "She is so easily tired!" he explained.

"Oh! she'll out-grow it," said the American. "I guess she thinks too much."

The Vicar nodded. "I am afraid," he said, "only children so often do, and there is nothing that is so tiring physically."

"Why, no!" said the American, "one can't keep up one's strength when one has got to follow one's mind. It goes too far." They shook hands and Bert Russell borrowed the book. The Vicar saw by his handling of it that it was safe. He told his wife about Dora.

"Yes," said Mrs. Fordington, "I shall try cod-liver oil."

The American walked back slowly. "He didn't argue about the pay of the clergy," he said to himself smiling a little. "I guess he thought it didn't matter. 'Poor and unpopular'—it might have come out of the New Testament, but it won't go down with the world. Somehow one isn't surprised that Prophets get stoned."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Now methinks I hear Death say of Life, as John Baptist said of Christ, 'He that cometh after me is before me.'"—HENRY MONTAGUE, EARL OF MANCHESTER.

SIR HENRY MIDDLETON had bought a yacht. It was really very convenient. When Dora's illness became serious and the doctor refused very curtly Lady Middleton's tentative suggestion "that the poor child would be really better at home—should she order the carriage?" the whole party seemed at loose ends. Lady Cheston remembered that she and the twins were really due in town for two balls and a dinner-party, and Reggie that a fellow wanted him to fish somewhere, soon. Arthur Field discovered that his practice called him immediately, and David that it was no use hanging about after Daphne.

Lady Middleton said that "It was really most sad and so exceedingly trying." She proposed to go for a two weeks' trip, and when she returned to Overham, she said "She hoped the dear child would be out of danger." What she really meant was that the child should be out of the house, and the doctor assured her that he thought this likely, " very likely," he added gravely.

Mr. and Mrs. Fordington were staying at The Hall, but Daphne and Katherine nursed the child. The hush and darkness that came over the house, when the last trunk had been swung into the last dog-cart, and the vague, light pleasure-seekers had all left, soon gave place to that sadder atmosphere of forced cheerfulness to be noticed in a house when the mystery of danger has become an hourly thing, not to be talked about, but to be dealt with. The Vicar sat a great deal by his child's bed-side, and Daphne believed that the rest of the time he was on his knees. His eyes had that peculiar far-seeing look that holds patience and pain in one glance, and one felt behind them both, there was a faith in the spiritual that was almost stern.

It was as if, he were facing one by one the struggles of love, and doubt, and darkness, and through them all claiming and asserting his hold on Eternal life. The doctor came in and asked him a question about his parish. He was a clever young man, and he generally asked questions. On this occasion his manner was a little nervous, and he seemed to be weighing many things. The Vicar looked at him appealingly. " What do you really think of the case, doctor ? " he pleaded.

The doctor became professional and non-committal.

"Your daughter?" he asked. "I think you have two very good nurses for her. She has been delicate for some time, hasn't she? Easily over-tired—excitable, you have noticed that?"

The Vicar nodded. "Indeed—yes," he said.

"Well, then, I should say, in that state of health the severe chill she took would fully account for her present condition."

"And her lungs?" the father pleaded. "She coughs so much, doctor."

"Do you think so?" the doctor answered. "Well, yes, on the whole, I should say she coughed a good deal, a slight spot at the base of one lung would be the cause—I will call in again to-night, unless Miss Linton sends for me before. I leave her in most excellent hands. Pray do not be over-anxious, Mr. Fordington." The doctor had another case in the village. It seemed so extraordinary to the Vicar, though he was a most charitable man, that it should matter about the case in the village.

Mrs. Fordington came into the room. "Now, doctor!" she said, "what have you been saying to my husband?"

"That I hope he will not be over-anxious, Mrs. Fordington."

"That's just what *I* tell him," said his wife. "Really, to hear him talk, one would think the child was seriously ill." The doctor said nothing. "When do you think she might begin to sit up?" she asked.

"Of course I feel that my place, as her mother, is by her bed-side, but the girls feel that their carelessness has brought this about, and it would hurt them if I were to send them away. Besides, of course, I have a great deal on my shoulders already."

"I think she is in safe hands," said the doctor. "She cannot sit up at all at present."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Fordington. "Don't you think, doctor, that all this lying in bed is very weakening?"

"I think it is essential," said the doctor, turning towards the door.

"And, Dr. Fern!" Mrs. Fordington called after him, "I really *do* object to Dora being given brandy. Our principles are so very distinctly temperance ones, that it sets a bad example to the parish when we use stimulants for our own child."

The doctor returned. "I must insist upon the stimulants, Mrs. Fordington," he said.

The Vicar's wife looked really annoyed. "How very arbitrary these medical men are!" she remarked to her husband. "I feel quite sure, from my own experience, which has been a varied one, that he merely says brandy because he cannot think of anything else to say. Local doctors are so ignorant. I shall tell Katherine Linton to give her milk alone."

"It will make no difference," said her husband suddenly, "*what* you tell Katherine."

"What do you mean, Wilfred?" cried his wife. It will never be known what the Vicar meant, for at that moment Katherine came into the room.

She looked strangely white and nervous, and passing over to the window, pulled down a blind. "I think," she said slowly, "it would be better for you to come upstairs, sir."

"May her soul rest in peace—and may perpetual light——" said the Vicar; then he broke down and covered his face with his hands.

"Wilfred, don't be Popish!" said his wife. "Katherine, tell me *at once* what is the matter? Is Dora worse?"

"No, Mrs. Fordington," said Katherine very gently with the tears running down her face. "She is *quite*, *quite* well." Then Mrs. Fordington understood.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Come away, for Life and Thought here no longer dwell;
But in a city glorious,
A great and distant city—have bought
A Mansion incorruptible; would they could have stayed with us!"
TENNYSON.

UPSTAIRS, Daphne lay face downwards on the floor of the child's room. She had done with Katherine all the quiet, hopeless things that have to be done. The little body lay beneath the sheet with folded hands, shut eyes, and smiling lips. The only change was that the noise of the laboured breathing had ceased, and in its stead, the palpable hush of death was in the room.

The sun shone through the blind upon the lilies; they had not been able to have lilies in the room before. Daphne felt that it was cruel to shut the windows; it was so difficult for the child to breathe with the windows shut. Her uncle had been into the room and prayed over the child. Her aunt, who had been crying a great deal, came in and made suggestions about the room. She talked in a whisper—

and walked on tiptoe—but she did not stay very long. Now the sun was setting, and all around the hall there were the cries of birds.

"Daphne, dear!" said her uncle's voice, "Daphne?"

"Oh! it is so terrible to hear you speak in this room!" she cried, but she rose to her feet, and stood before him shivering.

"The problem is over," said her uncle gently; "our child has passed, as we all pass at length, from the trivial surface out into the infinite deep—of God. Daphne, let us believe, 'Who made, hath not *unmade* the child.'" Daphne looked at him; the lines of pain in his face made him look ten years older. There was no doubt he realized.

"Full of immortality," he said half to himself, "beyond the reach of tears, and pangs, and pain, and *alive* for evermore! Can you not say, 'Thank God she is spared?' Not *to* us, but *from* the things that hurt and fail? Dear Daphne, try to say with me 'Christ's blessing on the newly born!'"

"You don't seem to understand," she said in low, level tones. "It was my carelessness—I could have saved her!"

"And now God has saved her," said her uncle gently.

The girl looked at him with despair in her eyes. "Oh! you won't understand!" she said, "you won't even leave me anything to be forgiven!"

"God forgive us all!" said her uncle very solemnly. "And Daphne—you made the child very happy—she loved you." Daphne moved helplessly forward, and her uncle took her into his arms. They were both crying. "And she won't cough any more; one can be glad of that!" said her uncle.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" Daphne sobbed. "One can be glad of that!"

Downstairs, Katherine was sitting with Mrs. Fordington. "I am so glad," said the Vicar's wife, "that the last skirt I bought was black—it seems a Providence; I had half a mind to buy a navy blue!" She took out her pocket-handkerchief.

"I meant to tell you, Mrs. Fordington," said Katherine quietly, "she died quite without pain. She was unconscious when the doctor came, and he was not gone half-an-hour when—when the room became quiet."

"I shall always think," said Mrs. Fordington, "that that young man, Fern, acted most reprehensibly in giving us no warning. What do you have a doctor for if it's not to tell you what you may expect!" Katherine did not attempt an answer. "I told Wilfred all along that a homœopath was best. I was *much* averse to the giving of brandy. I have heard before now of people who died from the reaction of stimulants, but doctors do anything to save themselves trouble!"

"You see, her heart was weak," Katherine threw in.

"I cannot believe that it was necessary, and it certainly did no good," said Mrs. Fordington firmly. "I have seen the undertaker," she went on, "poor Wilfred has no head at such times, and I have made all arrangements. We shall feel much better after the funeral. I have had a very kind note from Lady Middleton putting her carriage at our disposal. My idea was to stay here till it was all over. I was going to ask Mr. Ogden to take it, but Wilfred almost insists upon young Mitchell. It seems to me not at all the proper thing, he is only a curate, and he's sure to do something Roman. However, I gave in as usual. After all, why should *my* feelings be considered, I am only the child's mother!" Mrs. Fordington put her handkerchief to her eyes, she expected sympathy, but Katherine got up and left the room.

The house was lost in twilight and the creeping shadows rested her. The servants turned on the electric light, and the terrible world grew plain again.

Katherine was a little tired, she had been on her feet all day, and she was going to see her mother. On the way through the hall a servant met her with a letter.

"DEAR MISS LINTON," she read,

"I really have no right in the world to write to you, unless wishing to be read by you constitutes a right, but I am just so sorry as I can be about the dear little girl. I thought when I began to write I might find something to say, but there isn't anything, is there? I do believe though that Death isn't what we think it is, but the great way Out; and if the little girl you are looking after finds it, don't grieve too much! What we can see that's good in life (and after all it's a great world!) sort of makes one think there's something better that we are bound to see later on. If the child goes first be very sure she is going to have a good time. I'm coming down over Sunday this week if you don't tell me not to. I think Overham is a lovely place and you will have to say a very firm 'no' to stop my coming.

"Ever yours,
"BERT RUSSELL."

Katherine tore the letter very slowly into little pieces, then she dropped them into a waste-paper basket. "Oh! how stupid!" she exclaimed suddenly. "I've torn up the address and now I can't tell him not to come!" All the same her anger at her own stupidity was not very deep. It did not seem worth while to investigate the scraps in the hope of reconstructing his address. She walked briskly through the park. It was a very lovely evening, and she did not feel so tired now.

CHAPTER XX.

> " . . . . God forbid
> We judge man by the faults of youth in age!"
>
> ROBERT BROWNING.

KATHERINE walked into her mother's room humming a tune. The exercise had done her good, and there was relief in the air. The relief from uncertainty, which death, in spite of its terrors, sets at rest. Mrs. Linton was dressed in rose-coloured silk, there was a delicate flush on her cheeks, and her eyes were unusually bright. A tall, military man, with a white moustache, was sitting opposite her; he might have been fifty, but he did not look it. There was something slightly familiar in his face, though Katherine knew that she had never seen him before. She stood silently looking from one to the other. Her mother made a little nervous movement towards her.

"We were expecting you, dear," she said. "Won't you sit down?"

The man shut the door after her, he also offered her a chair.

"I am very, very happy, my dear," said her mother, "but there is so much to explain, that I don't know where to begin!"

"You might begin by telling me," said Katherine, glancing at her mother's companion, "who this gentleman is, and what he is doing here?" She was not altogether unprepared for her mother's answer. She had been waiting for it for seven years.

"This is your father, Katherine, and he has come to take me away."

"This man," said Katherine, looking at her mother, "is a perfect stranger to me, and I should be glad if he would go away until you have finished your explanation."

"The girl's quite right," said the man with an awkward chuckle. "Better talk it out alone, Louie."

"Walter, I must beg you not to go!" cried Mrs. Linton.

Katherine's lips quivered for a moment; she saw that her mother was afraid of her, and it hurt her.

"Very well, then," she said, "say what you have got to say, and then let me go, this situation is impossible." Mrs. Linton sank further into her chair, she almost cowered.

"Colonel Dalgeny," she began, moistening her lips, "knew me when I was a little girl, Katherine; then he went to India, and I married Edward Linton. I do not think I ever really cared for him——"

"You have told me that before," interrupted

Katherine, "and I told you that was no excuse." The Colonel coughed, and shot an amused glance at Mrs. Linton. Mrs. Linton gasped, and went on:

"Shortly after our marriage he began to drink; we went out to India, and there was a child, and it died."

"They do die in India, you know," said the Colonel in a friendly aside to Katherine.

"I was not supposing that my mother had killed it!" said his daughter viciously.

"Oh, Katherine!" groaned Mrs. Linton.

"Go on, mother!" said the girl impatiently, "the child fortunately died."

The Colonel walked across to the window. He hated with all his heart the whole scene, but his duty to the woman he had come back for, prevented his escape. He remembered that Louie was rather fond of scenes.

"Colonel Dalgeny was at the station," went on Mrs. Linton.

"I don't think you need go into all that, Louie," said the Colonel from the window. "Go on from the time you left."

"Walter was married too, you know," Mrs. Linton said rather helplessly.

"Did—*his* wife drink?" asked Katherine bitterly. The Colonel shot round from the window.

"No!" he shouted, then he recovered himself, and added gently, "She was a very good woman. She died ten days ago."

"How extremely fortunate," said Katherine; then she turned to her mother: "I suppose that is why you have gone out of mourning," she said, "for Captain Linton?"

"You are simply cruel," cried her mother. "Have you no pity?"

"May I ask you the *point* of this discussion?" said Katherine coldly. "In other words, what do you intend to do now there are no more encumbrances?"

"We are going to be married," said Mrs. Linton, "at a registry office, to-morrow. Colonel Dalgeny meets me in town, he has a special licence."

"I should think," said Katherine, "he would need one." There was an awkward silence. "I suppose your kindly waiting here, to see me," began Katherine, "implies a desire to feel easy about me, and not to leave me in the lurch."

"Yes, dear," said her mother. "If you only knew what I feel——"

"Thank God I don't!" said Katherine very shortly, "nor do I wish to!"

Mrs. Linton began to cry, and the Colonel drummed with his fingers on the pane. "I will allow you two hundred a year," he said without looking around.

"You may allow it to something else," said Katherine.

Her mother shook with sobs. Katherine's lips quivered again, but her father's next words steeled her heart. "You cannot have led your mother a very happy life," he said.

"You should have thought of that before," retorted Katherine, her eyes blazing. "You may like to know my plans, mother," she added. "I have ten pounds in the bank, which should procure me a nursing outfit. I shall go up for an examination to be held in June at one of the London hospitals. Till then, I shall stay with Daphne."

"You may fail?" her father put in.

"I may," said Katherine. The Colonel smiled a little grimly to himself; his daughter was certainly (he thought) a surprising young person. "Then I think there is nothing more to say, mother," said Katherine, rising to her feet, "except that I hope Colonel Dalgeny will lead you—a very happy life. If you should need me at any time, I feel sure that the Vicar would forward your letters to me. By-the-bye, Dora died this morning." Katherine walked towards the door.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Katherine!" said Mrs. Linton. "Have you nothing to say to your father?" she pleaded.

The Colonel turned towards her, their eyes met. For one moment, in spite of herself, Katherine felt a strange unspoken sympathy rise up between them, then the passionate jealousy that was fighting at her heart got the better of her moment's tenderness.

"I have nothing at all to say to my father," she said.

"Oh, my child!" cried her mother, "won't you even say good-bye to me?"

"Good-bye, mother," said the girl, facing her from the door. She went out, shutting it carefully after her.

The two, left by themselves, looked at each other.

Outside, the moon was rising and hung frail as a "little feather" above the trees. The air was full of the poetry of spring, and the two birds that sang in the lane were nightingales. Katherine began to feel bitterly ashamed.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Put pain from out the world, what room were left,
For thanks to God, for love to man?"
ROBERT BROWNING.

THERE were not many passers-by in the street, though it led from one of the principal thoroughfares of London. Bareheaded students strolled by, and nurses hurried nervously towards the great iron gates. It seemed a border-land between the place inside them, and the fierce clamour of the open road, where the 'busses caught one up, and landed one later on in Oxford Street, or Piccadilly, or anywhere in the world beyond, if anyone wanted a world beyond! As a matter of fact many of the neatly dressed women passing so swiftly through this borderland would have given much, that they did not possess, to pocket this freedom.

They came to the iron gates and gave up a "pass" into the hands of a venerable porter, who might have been a St. Peter without h's, so grave and reverent was his bearing.

Even in this simple operation they betrayed the secret of their characters. Some passed by him, self-engrossed, and unthinkingly, others with an increased rigidity to show their superior caste, some with a flippant and familiar remark, and one with a greeting of real friendship, and an enquiry about his wife. There are not many people who remember that porters have wives.

"She's goin' in to-morrow, Miss!" he said.

"What ward?" his friend asked.

"Yours isn't Luke, Miss, by h'any chance?" he asked anxiously.

"By the happiest chance in the world—it is!" she told him; "you must let me know her number, John," she added.

"Twenty I think it be, Miss, but you'll know her for sure, she's to 'ave so much took away."

The nurse nodded sympathetically. There were many others who were in the same case, but she did not say so. To-morrow the great visiting surgeon was to go through the ward, with his little sentences that had such strangely wide and deep effects upon the listeners. "I'll look out for her, John," she said. "Keep a good heart, why they pull you through anything, these doctors!"

His face brightened. "H'and I should say, Miss," he said with a slow compliment, "the nurses 'ave an 'and!"

"Thank you, John," the girl laughed, "good-night." She passed swiftly through the large court.

It was a still, shut-in place, in spite of rows of students on seats by a fountain, and nurses passing from one wide open door to another. The steps and the lifts were seldom empty, but the same people so rarely seemed to come out. After awhile the feeling that inside there was some great, silent call, that drew first one and then another from the outer world within, became a superstition and a fear. You could go up the steps too, and look into the hall, no one stopped you. An occasional staff-nurse or sister cast you a quick, withering glance, but left you undisturbed. Certain doors that closed quickly after these figures had the names of the wards written above them, and these doors you could not pass through. Then one knew that from behind them the call came. The great, terrible call of those who have been caught under the wheel of life. The cry of children born with death fighting in them, and against them, the appeal of the down-trodden who, through no fault of their own, face the battle-field of the world, and find themselves carried to the rear before the fight begins. The diseased, the intemperate, the broken, those placed for awhile in the back-water, those for ever stagnant and counted out. Oh, the hundreds of the counted out! Surely the cry of them was in itself enough to draw, with unremitting impulse, the brave, strong ones of the earth, into a desperate attempt to save, and a powerful purpose to assist them? And through the cry of those who suffer comes the whisper of those who die. That seemed the answer to the ordered stillness and the hurrying quiet of the place. One felt that the issues of life demanded the very atmosphere that reigned. One understood why all the workers seemed absorbed, tired, and quick. They were the hand-maidens of a tremendous struggle, these quiet-voiced, pleasant-faced women. Outside, in the world, or in the hours off duty, many of them were impatient, cross, small-minded, and they would not have known what was meant by the soul of their work. Only when the iron gates clanged behind them, and the call of the door drew them within, every feature and muscle and feeling became unconsciously at one. A stern harmony of mercy, at war with pain.

"You are two minutes late, Miss Linton," said the sister. "Kindly take No. 10's temperature—pulse—and respiration. I shall require you as special for No. 5 to-night."

Katherine was not changed, but she had softened, she had lost her bitterness and gained a sense of toleration which she had never known before. There is nothing like realizing pain to soften one's heart towards sinners. One is brought face to face with consequences, and when from wronged and exhausted nature the uttermost farthing is wrung, there is nothing left but pity. Katherine had become very sorry instead of very angry, and it had done her good.

Daphne, in a sudden impulse, partly of friendship, partly of remorse, and partly perhaps from a desire to put off her marriage, had joined her friend and shared a room with her.

She was not in the least changed, and one student dreamed about her at night. Katherine said by day too, for he was always stupid over the dressings.

Daphne spent much of her time off with David, and could not make up her mind whether to sign on at the end of her probation, or to marry David. If Katherine was very upset, she supposed she would sign on, and if David was very angry, she might (she supposed) have to give in to him. What she should do if both these things were to happen she had not yet fully considered. The shocks and changes of the last few months had left her strangely indifferent to her own future, and for Daphne indifference meant indecision. It was only when she wanted a thing that she grew determined.

Meanwhile she had grasped at the novelty and picturesqueness of Katherine's choice, and entered into hospital life with an even keener interest and enthusiasm than her friend. The staff-nurse liked her because she was good at her work. The patients adored her because she was so sorry for them, but they preferred Katherine to do things for them; she seemed to have more useful hands.

CHAPTER XXII.

"The wind of Death's imperishable wing."
—ROSSETTI.

"NO. 5" was a baby, and he must not be allowed to cry. Nurse Linton's strong arms grew very weary before morning, and yet she felt strangely proud.

A staff-nurse commiserated her on the case; she said she would rather have a whole ward to see to than one baby. Katherine could not understand this, but it does not do to question a staff-nurse.

The ward at night seemed an unreal place. Katherine watched a delirious woman counting unendingly on her fingers. "2s. 3d.—2s. 4d.—2s. 6d. cash!" she repeated monotonously. "Change for a half-sovereign, change for——" The nurse on duty gave her a drink. She was disturbing the other patients; they did not feel very friendly towards her. She had been very proud when she first came in, and boasted of her salary as a "hand" in one of the big Oxford Street shops. She was not so proud now; her operation had shown her to be riddled with tubercles—abscesses were constantly forming, and she was very feverish every night. "Mr. Delany, *I* said change for——" she began again.

"I wish to goodness they'd put 'er h'inter another room, that's what *I* wish," grumbled the woman next to her with a broken leg. "*I* can't get h'any good h'out of the night with 'er jabberin like mad 'un! Why can't they put 'er away, that's what *I* want to know!"

"You be quiet!" said the nurse briefly. Katherine's baby woke and she began walking up and down with him.

"Nurse," whispered a young girl as she passed her, "oh, nurse! do you think they'll operate on me to-morrow? Oh! I'm so frightened! I can't sleep! Can't you come and hold my hand or something?"

Katherine looked at her baby and satisfied herself as to his being asleep again. "Don't fret," she said kindly to the girl; "why, you won't know anything about it—you'll be put to sleep!"

The staff-nurse came over to her. "Nurse, go back to your place!" she said curtly; "you seem to forget you're doing special to-night!"

Two women snored on separate notes steadily; this infuriated a third who lay between them, and she whispered terrible language towards the ceiling. As it neared morning the light of the sky made the ward look like a scene in a theatre. One or two of the worst cases had to be rubbed. One woman fainted, and the nurse rushed into the ward kitchen for hot-water bottles. Katherine's baby became very cold, she gave it stimulants, and she began to be afraid that it was going to die.

The staff-nurse was fighting over the fainting woman. "Put the baby down and come here," she said to Katherine.

"Let me hold it," whispered the girl who was afraid of the operation. "I—I know how to hold babies, nurse." Katherine placed it gently in her arms.

"Put the screens round the bed," said the staff-nurse, "now the brandy again! You fool, not that bottle!" neither she nor Katherine noticed the expression. The woman's face became grey. "Well! she won't have to have her operation to-morrow," said the staff-nurse, putting back the bottle. "Heart failure. Get some water and a clean sheet, nurse!"

"Oh! but she isn't dead!" pleaded Katherine, "feel how warm her hands are! Can't we go on working?"

The staff shook her head. "Not a bit of use!" she said kindly. "It's your first death, isn't it? I shall report you to sister as having been serviceable. Get the things, and then go back to your baby!"

Katherine obeyed. The ward was quite light now, the probationer was putting out the gas. Katherine met the nurse with the hot water bottles, her eyes filled with tears. "It's no use now," she said.

"What? No. 11's gone? Well, they'll do for someone else!" said the other nurse.

Katherine went back to the girl who had held her baby. She was afraid it would be dead too, and hugged its little warm body with a sense of passionate possession in her arms.

The girl looked at her hungrily. "I had one like that, nurse," she said, "but it died."

"Oh! I'm so sorry!" said Katherine.

"Well, you needn't be," said the girl, turning her head away, "it wasn't wanted." Katherine saw her hands were bare of rings. The patients were being roused for their breakfasts. No. 10, the one who had been delirious all night and had just dropped off to sleep, was left alone. The woman next to her was very angry.

"Well, h'of h'all the h'injustice," she exclaimed, "'ere am I, a respectable woman with my leg broke in two places and me situation as charwoman gorne for months, kept h'awake h'all night by this young baggage, and when I just tikes me forty winks h'Im shook up, h'and she's let to lie peaceful h'as a bibe! Bloomin' fivorite, that's what *she* is. My belief h'is nurse h'is bribed!"

"Here, you take your breakfast," said the nurse. In the full light of the morning sun the nurses looked tired and white, but their eyes were awake, and their hands seemed unwearied.

The day nurses came into the ward. One came up to Katherine and relieved her of her baby. "I'm special for No. 5," she said; "you look as if you needed your dinner."

The sister swept up the ward to the bed with the screens around. When she came out, she spoke sharply to a new probationer, who nearly dropped a basin; she had been a sister for ten years, but even she was not used to what happened behind the little screens; but now she only showed it by a little extra sharpness. In her morning report she put "No. 11 vacant."

The next four hours were simply a strenuous fight with time. A noisy chaos of labour with the sharp-tongued sister directing up and down the long wards, and reducing at length all to an order, a cleanliness and a brightness, that looked to the outsider as if anything else was never known, yet the process was gone through every day.

In the dining-room the night nurses were having their dinner. Some of them talked, but most of them hurried through their meal and disappeared.

"It's a pity you were on night, Nurse Linton," said Katherine's next-door neighbour. "Our great consultant goes round this afternoon; we call him the King, you know. He has such fine eyes!"

"And oh! you should see him at the theatre," said another. "He's *the* man on hip disease, you know, and his fingers—well, I never saw such fingers on a man! They say his touch is as quick as lightning, and he can spot a tubercular abscess in half-an-eye!"

"What is his name?" asked Katherine, more for want of something to stem her friend's details than a desire to know.

"Why, didn't you know? We have Arthur Field; we're as proud of it as if we had the House of Parliament, and he's a great deal more useful."

"No, I didn't know," said Katherine thoughtfully. Daphne was on day duty, she remembered. The Home Sister, glancing down the table, told her to be quick and go to bed. She almost stumbled upstairs fighting against sleep, as against an enemy, but the moment her head touched the pillow, she was conquered. She did not even know that she had been defeated. She was asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"In the end one experiences only one's true self."
NIETZSCHE.

ARTHUR FIELD had crippled himself at twenty-three when he married Rosamonde Dormay, the very pretty daughter of a neighbouring squire, and everybody said he had done very well for himself. Mrs. Dormay had some mysterious malady called "headache," which frequently confined her to her room for days at a time, a malady apparently escaping definition.

Two months after his marriage with Rosamonde, coming back one night late from his practice, he found her lying on the sofa. She was very flushed, and complained of pain in the head. It was so bad that she did not see she had left the brandy bottle on the table. Her husband carried her up to bed, and the next morning asked her about it. She was very frightened, very angry, and very hysterical, finally she confessed that it was the malady which escaped definition in her mother, but she swore it was the first time for herself. Arthur Field did not believe her, and he never believed her from that hour.

He understood why the Dormays had been so ready to accept him for a son-in-law. He did all that human service and skill could suggest to cure his pretty young wife. He spent far more than he could afford on the best specialists of his time, he put her under the most excellent treatment he could procure, and people thought he could not be very kind to his wife or she would not go away from him so often. Stories grew up about him, and his practice fell off. He went to London and fought for fame, and because he was utterly concentrated on his profession, desperate, unhappy, and entirely alone and also, perhaps, because he cared very little about it, he became known as one of the " best men " in London. His wife lived under a different name at a little seaside place with a good nurse. She hated her husband, but she was abjectly afraid of him, and her family almost from the time of her marriage had nothing to do with her. In spite of most careful watching she still, from time to time, had headaches.

In his holidays Arthur Field went to Paris and studied hypnotism. When he felt himself to have mastered all that was as yet found out about it, he tried the process on his wife. At first it seemed an evident success, and he began to hope; while he was with her, she even resisted temptation. The day after he went back to London the nurse telegraphed, " Failure."

That day he performed an operation that his older colleagues had pronounced out of the question. It was a success, and the patient recovered, but there was one thing that never recovered, and that was Arthur Field's hope.

No one in London knew that Arthur Field was married. The little country place where it had all happened was too far off; only one of the Dormays ever met him again, and Lady Middleton wished to hear nothing of her sister. "For what," she said, "is the use of hearing anything, when there is nothing pleasant to hear?" Arthur Field quite agreed with her, and would indeed have avoided her sedulously, had it not been for his introduction to Daphne and the sudden opening of his closed and saddened heart to the child. He knew that there was no happiness for him in honesty, but his whole nature was starving for it. He had never drugged his misery with the antidotes, that the world tries to supply, and now every thwarted passion, controlled desire, and keen zest, for the beauty of life, clamoured at his heart. He was a man of honour and he did not mean to harm the child. There were ways of proving to the Dormays that Rosamonde was dead, if it was necessary to prove anything. No one would ask any questions, partly because he was a man that people were a little afraid to question, and also because everyone would wish to take the answers for granted. It would be an ugly secret, but as a visible fact it was a much more ugly truth. Daphne would never know, and oh! he would be good to her! He never counted on Daphne's speaking to Vera before the fact was accomplished. He knew she hated her stepmother; but when the fact that he had never counted upon happened (as it usually does) though the girl was practically in his power, though he could have persuaded her to do anything that he chose, he deliberately let her go. She knew, and now she must prove the strength of her love, he would never give her an excuse to regret. It cost him more than anything in his life had ever cost him, and for three years he called himself a fool daily, but he never gave in to wisdom. When he saw Daphne again, she had confused the issues of things with principles of which before she had been ignorant, and which he had always ignored. At first he could not face the notion of giving her up; what he considered her underhand engagement to David Grey only strengthened his decision. He never meant to force her will, and only threatened her to see if, after all, there was not at the back of her attempt to send him away, a desire for him to refuse to go. Then circumstances, through the illness and death of Dora, drove Daphne's heart away from him; she wrote him a terrible little letter, and because he could not see her face, he believed every word of it. He thought over it all with the deliberate intention of doing the best for them both. There was only one thing he left out of his calculations, and that was—

three years. They had influenced him as well as Daphne. He was now thirty-eight, and he loved his profession. When, after a bitter struggle with himself against his longing for the beautiful girl, he reached the knowledge that his duty was to give her up, he thought his last joy in life was killed with his own hand. There was an important consultation to be held the next day, and he began to take some notes on the subject. They presented a fresh and entirely original idea, and he forgot Daphne.

More of us do right because to do wrong breaks into our life, than we know, but in this case Arthur Field had given up a lower life for the sake of a higher, and even if this higher were not the highest, it was distinctly a step towards it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"One has to learn to leave oneself out of account, this hardness is required of every mountain climber."—NIETZSCHE.

THERE was a perceptible stir down the long ward as the great consultant entered, followed by his train of eager students.

The sister knew that her pulse was beating faster, and the nurses stood at attention, ready for an instant's flight in any direction. It was Nurse Fordington's turn to go round with the doctors, and to wait upon the sister. The other nurses did not wonder that she looked rather white. Daphne's ward was a men's surgical; at first she had been with Katherine, and the change had only been made two days before. The surgeon did not see her, he bent over the bed of a young fellow in great pain, who was biting his lips to keep the groans back.

"Want another tube," the surgeon said without turning. The hand that gave it to him trembled. He was a man that noticed everything, and he turned sharply round. It was a moment from which only years of utter self-control could save him. He scowled, and muttered something about, " confounded clumsiness," and the sister shot Daphne a look which was calculated to make some difference in her manner, but it made none. What the sister's warning had failed in though, the surgeon's scowl accomplished. Daphne did not see why he should scowl at her like that, and the next thing she handed to him quite firmly.

" I have half-an-hour to spare, sister, and must operate upon No. 6 to-day. Can't put it off till to-morrow. Can you get him ready? While you are doing so, I wish to speak to this nurse. I know her in another capacity." The ward round had been made, and he spoke to the sister alone.

" It's quite against the rules, sir," said the sister hesitating.

" I am quite aware of that," said the surgeon. " I have not much time to spare, where can I see her? "

" In my room, sir," said the sister. " I will send her to you immediately."

The surgeon nodded. He did not look like a man who was nervous, but when he got into the sister's little sitting-room he sat down. When Daphne entered, he rose to his feet and scowled again. " What are you doing here? " he asked, " and why on earth did you come? "

" I am a nurse as you see," said Daphne, " and I came here because I could not bear my life."

"Nonsense! We can all bear our lives," said Arthur Field, "and make other people's lives unbearable as well! You aren't strong enough for this work, and this hospital's mine!"

"I did not know that when I came here," said Daphne.

"And now you do?" asked he sharply.

"I shall stay here," said Daphne, "I think."

He walked up and down the tiny room with impatient strides. He had determined to give her up, and he was a man who generally carried out his determination, but he had not expected to see her, and he found chance a disconcerting adversary, who could not be counted on. Around them both, the life of the great hospital sped on. The time table of the nurse's hours hung over the sister's desk. He read it twice through without stopping. Then he turned to Daphne again.

"This is the best managed hospital in London," he said, "but somebody must always suffer for everything. We keep people alive who would be better out of the world, and we work people to death who would make it a better world! In old days the patients died, and the doctors were saved. Now it's the other way about. I have barely fifteen years more good work in me, and then I shall die in my tracks! My God! though, but it's worth it! Daphne, why aren't you sitting down?"

"You forget I am a nurse, sir."

He stopped amused, and again his eyes travelled over her in her neat uniform. "Nonsense!" he said, but he did not press the point. They neither of them could forget that they were in the hospital. "I got your letter, Daphne," he said.

"I—I wrote it," she murmured, "when I was quite desperate."

"Yes," he said, "it was desperate, and it was real. Daphne, you are quite right, it would be impossible for us to live together with such different standards. Once I thought that I could change yours, now I do not know that I have any right to try."

Daphne looked at him. Was this the man who had demanded love of her, as his due, who had thrust aside her passionate appeals, had over-ridden her new-born principles, had broken her will, as he might straighten out an instrument? Now he was offering her a freedom which struck her as she looked at him, as the emptiest, and coldest thing in the world. Words sprang to her lips which would have changed their lives. Pride, indignation, vanity, surged through her, lit by a passion she could not understand. It did not seem possible that the man before her could be oblivious to this change in her, to the fact that he had only to claim, what he had pleaded for, from the depths of his thirsty heart three months ago. The silence deepened the stress, and movement, of the world beyond the sister's room. They seemed cast on eternal loneliness and stillness, a void place had been made for them in the universe, and just outside the great hungry stream of life rushed by.

The surgeon looked at his watch. "Do not let me keep you," said Daphne, "I understand."

"You have been the dream of my life, Daphne," he said.

"And now you have found the reality," said Daphne bitterly.

"No! but I have found that you are not strong enough to do what you do not think is right," he said; "you would repent, and you are very young, Daphne —I should never forgive myself. You do not realize, and until lately I did not realize myself how little I have to offer you, in return for the most tremendous sacrifice a woman can make."

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried at last, feeling as if not a single thing in life could make up for the separation from him, "isn't it worth while to make a sacrifice for love?"

"Not if you are going to be sorry for it afterwards," he said. "Good-bye. Stick to your work here. I shall never disturb you."

He held out his hand; for a moment she would not take it, she thought he would never let her go without kissing her, and she knew that if he kissed her, he would never let her go. If he had been a weaker man she would have ruined both their lives.

"Good-bye, Daphne," he said, and passed by her to the door. He met the sister in the passage.

"No. 6 has gone to the theatre, sir," she said, "I shall have to let you have Nurse Fordington. I am very sorry but we are under-staffed."

"It does not matter," said Arthur Field. And yet it made it very hard. Her presence at his side, the knowledge of her still, white face, the cry in his heart to win her back to him, to ignore the consequences, to prevent the irrevocable, made the operation a time of intense trial. His hand never faltered, a few stern directions shot out, clear and concise as usual. Daphne, watching him, felt quite sure he had ceased to care for her, and she knew that she should have felt relieved. Instead she was hurt beyond the power of words, and smarted under a sense of bitter wrong.

She had pleaded to him to let her go, but she had never meant that he should let her go so easily. She had written to him that though he might force her will the love in her heart was dead to him, but she could not forgive him for not kissing her, she was almost sure he knew, that she wanted him to. Last and worst of all, she had trusted unconsciously, that he would set her free from David, and now she was face to face with the inevitable consequences of her word, and inevitable consequences are not always pleasant facts to deal with.

"Well, nurse!" asked the other probationer on her return, "how did you get through your first operation?"

"Was it my first?" said Daphne.

"Why, of course it was, sister wouldn't have let you go in, if she could have helped it. The king hates raw nurses."

"I think I got through all right," said Daphne, "thank you."

"And what did you think of the king?" the nurse persisted.

"I don't quite—know," said Daphne slowly.

"Of course it takes some time to get used to him, you know," the nurse continued.

"I should think it would," said Daphne. Looking up at the clock she saw that it was time for tea.

CHAPTER XXV.

"What name doth joy most borrow
When Life is fair ?
To-morrow.
What name doth best fit sorrow
In young despair ?
To-morrow."

BERT RUSSELL was a young man, about whom people knew extremely little. He was taken for granted because he had well-bred manners, and was very useful. If disagreeable things had leaked out about him, plenty of his acquaintances would have professed themselves as not in the least surprised; but meantime he was invited everywhere and went out a great deal. He made no confidences about his life, partly because he found people were more interested, in making confidences about their own, and also because he felt quite certain no one would understand. He had been recommended to Lady Middleton's husband by a transatlantic Professor, and Lady Middleton had brought him out. She generally said that he was extremely well off. She probably thought he was, on the theory that American men did so well at business. There were many things that this particular American man did very well, but business was not one of them. His father had been a consumptive New England farmer, who gave his sons as good an education as he could afford, and a conscience of which he had an almost over-abundant stock; then he died. The eldest brother took on the farm, and Bert went to New York. There he passed through most things in his attempt to get on, even through tramp shelters, and nights in Central Park. But they were summer ones and somehow his good humour, his conscience, and his pluck, pulled him through. At last he wrote up his experiences rather picturesquely on borrowed paper, and was given occasional jobs on a New York daily. This opened the way, and he was not slow to take it.

Two years of yellow journalism, a sub-editorship, a brilliant novel, and he was launched. Then he went back to New England, and nursed his mother until she also died of consumption. His brother had married, his family increased yearly—and his profits decreased every season, and his wife—nagged him. Bert had been rather fond of her himself at one time, but he had always been a little suspicious of her mouth which bent down at the corners. Six years of married life had made the corners go very far down indeed. Bert was offered a good post on an English paper, through some English acquaintances, and it was this, which had taken him to London.

There he made friends with everybody, from his

London landlady who smiled at him and saw that no one cheated him but herself, to the head of his office and the conductors of busses. It paid him to go into society, and he used to be very careful of his dress suit. He sent back two-thirds of his income to his brother in New England.

Katherine was unlike any girl he had ever met. Society types he understood, and the different shades of village aristocracy in America made him famously at home with the lower middle classes; but this curt, determined young woman who could blush so beautifully, and look at you so steadily, who had so very little to say, and yet gave you the impression that she could do so much, delighted and puzzled him.

He was quite aware that she had very strong prejudices, and that he upset nearly all of them, but this only added zest to their encounters. When he went back to Overham the Sunday after Dora's death, he met her at the early service, to which, through the sweetness of the morning, he had himself been drawn. The sun was shining down on the quiet churchyard. Weeping willows drooped over the grass, and the flowers that grew over and around the graves were covered with dew. It was a perfect summer morning, and as he looked at the girl in her muslin dress, and her fair, fresh, English face, he began to wish very much he had not come. He took her prayer-book out of her hand, and they walked in silence to the old wood gate.

"I can carry my prayer-book quite well myself, thank you," said Katherine crisply as they reached the gate. His wish vanished.

"It makes me feel good to carry a prayer-book," he said. "It reminds me of the time when I had to learn my collect every Sunday and sit on the hardest chair in the room. My! those Sundays, how they took the stiffening out of one. And I wonder how much religion they managed to insert? Do you know the story of the little girl whose dog followed her down the street one day? 'Jack!' she said, 'go home! It's bad enough to have God always tagging after me without *you're* being around!' She was a little American girl, you know, Miss Linton."

"I do not think that is any excuse," said Katherine sternly. Then the image caught her, and she began to smile. When they reached the hill that led up to Lady Middleton's park, they both turned back, and looked at the beautiful old church, and the sun-fretted, rich, green landscape.

"I got your letter," said Katherine gently, "just after the child had left us. It was good of you to write it."

"Oh, no!" said the American, "my little sister died just at that age. The winters are very bad where we live. I had three sisters, and they all died, that one stayed the longest. After all, they're so many things we can't understand, perhaps it would be more of a mystery if they had lived; and God's side of the mystery must be the brightest." Katherine said nothing, but she glanced at him as if she understood. "Where is your home, Miss Linton?" he asked her, after a silence which cost him an effort to break.

"I do not live anywhere at present," Katherine answered, "I am staying with Daphne until I can go into Hospital."

"To earn your own living?" he questioned in surprise.

"Why on earth *not?*" said Katherine angrily; "you speak as if it were an unheard-of thing; I have always earned my own living, since I was old enough to know what life meant!"

"Why do you know *that?*" he asked her smiling; "tell me what it means?"

"Hard work!" said Katherine, giving him her hand, "and if you happen to be a woman, very little pay. I am going into breakfast."

"Will you come out with me this afternoon," he asked, "into the woods; I must go back to-night?"

Katherine frowned. She had been indoors so much lately, and she was a creature of the fresh out-door world. "If I can get Daphne to go to sleep," she said; "the girl's worn out!"

"I will call for you at three," he said, "to enquire."

"I don't think it's worth while you doing that," Katherine answered hesitatingly.

"Oh! you must leave that question for me to decide," Bert Russell replied laughing.

Daphne went to sleep, and Katherine went out. It was impossible for her to realize that she had been happy, but she was too honest to deny it even to herself. Though it was the day after little Dora's death, and though she had seen her home taken from her in an hour, yet in the woods, and in the sunshine, and in the presence of her companion, she had found a pleasure which was more than that of relief. A positive gladness in the world and life and youth. She was not at all sure that she liked him, but she was quite sure that she had enjoyed the day.

When he went back by train that night, Bert Russell cursed himself for a selfish fool, and sent more than he could rightly afford to his brother in New England. He had not seen Katherine since, but he found out from Lady Middleton that Daphne was with her, that they both had passed the entrance examination, and were together in the hospital.

"Why!" said poor Lady Middleton, shaking her head, "Daphne should shut herself up in an unpleasant, positively painful place for the hottest months of the year, when she ought to get married, or go to Scotland with me, or stay quietly in the country with her uncle, is *more* than I can explain. Her friend's mother has just married Colonel Dalgeny, a delightful creature! It seems, things used to be said, you know, but now of course they are married and it is quite all right. Still, Katherine Linton would earn her own living, though I hear she could have married a parson. What girls are coming to, I positively daren't think! The ones who might marry don't, and there are such herds of those who can't, and *no* nunneries to speak of! Such a pity there aren't more nunneries, I think, Mr. Russell, don't you?"

"Was there a *real* parson?" Bert asked, "or do you simply mean on general principles she might have married one?"

"Oh, no one marries on general principles, Mr. Russell," said Lady Middleton smiling. "I mean that nice fellow at Overham, he quite saw my point about teaching Sunday school teachers the harp. I wonder if he believes in nunneries? Those High Churchmen *do* rather, you know."

"I do not expect he would believe in a nunnery for Miss Linton," Bert said gravely. "I am not altogether sure that I should myself. It seems to me, Lady Middleton, you ought to start a scheme for emigrating the women who can't marry. The women who won't, may change their minds."

Lady Middleton looked interested. "I think I will just make a note of that," she said, dragging out a silver pencil and a little ivory slate. "Emigration for women who can't—— Oh, Mr. Russell, an idea has just occurred to me."

"What is it, Lady Middleton?" asked the young American.

"Well, you know," said Lady Middleton with great concern, "perhaps they won't like to have it thought that they can't marry, you see!"

"Better call it by another name then. Emigration an opening for the unmarried?" he suggested, taking up his hat.

Lady Middleton wrote it down. "I think," she said with much enthusiasm, "this may lead to a really important movement, Mr. Russell."

Bert Russell walked through Grosvenor Square and looked towards the City. The hospital was in the City.

"I wonder if she likes that parson," he thought; "at any rate nurses get off sometimes, she may let me take her out."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Strange the world about me lies,
  Never yet familiar grown,
Still disturbs me with surprise,
  Haunts me like a face half known."

WATSON.

"I WISH you were coming, too," said Daphne, rather wistfully. She had a late pass, and David was coming to take her to a theatre.

Katherine sat on her bed drinking cocoa while her friend dressed. "I don't like David," she said slowly, "at all."

Daphne flung a scarf of scarlet chiffon over her dark hair. She was dressed all in white, and the contrast told. "David is a dear boy," said Daphne. "He really doesn't bother me in the least. Sometimes I quite forget we are engaged."

Katherine frowned. "That's just it," she said, "you ought not to forget it, and what is more, you ought not to wish to!"

"Your verbs, dear," said Daphne, playing with some scarlet carnations, "are so imperative! you don't seem to realize—that I do not expect golden dreams, and

I do not like thrills. I have had my day of excitement. Nevertheless I have got possibly a good many years before me, so I shall marry David. It will be ——" she paused to look at the result of the carnations, "very restful."

"That's just exactly what it *won't* be!" said Katherine, putting down her cup with a bang. "It will be hell! You'll hate yourself, and you'll be tied to him. It wouldn't matter so much if he didn't care for you but he does, and you'll hate that!"

Daphne's lips shut tight. This was already true, but she did not mean to acknowledge it. "I never heard before that a woman disliked a man for caring for her," she said.

"Possibly not—when he's not her husband!" said Katherine. "That is where the difficulty comes in."

"Of course I shouldn't let David take me alone to-night," said Daphne irrelevantly, "his aunt is coming too."

"Yes," Katherine persisted, "but his aunt won't always be coming too, Daphne."

Daphne put down the flowers on the dressing-table and went over to her friend. She took her by the shoulders, and looked into her eyes. "Katherine," she said, "I have given my word, you must never talk to me in this way again. I understand quite well what it means. One must pay for everything in this world, and we women have to pay high, but I'm not prepared to talk about the price! Good-night!"

She caught up the cloak, Katherine had put out for her, and ran out of the room. The day-nurses were coming in for supper, she met and passed them, with merry greetings. They envied her a great deal. She crossed the cool courtyard, stopping to speak to the porter about his wife; she was in Katherine's ward, and was doing very well. A hansom swung into the little street, and pulled up at the iron gates. The figure of a tall, well-dressed young man sprang out.

"Is that you, Daphne?"

Daphne drew in a long breath, then she held out her hand. "I am quite ready, David," she said. "Is your aunt going to meet us at the theatre?" she asked a few minutes later.

David gave a queer little laugh. "I think not, dear," he said, "it seemed to me we would have more fun alone. After all what does it matter, we're engaged, we can do what we like?"

"I am not altogether sure I do like it," said Daphne, "you told me you would bring her."

"Don't be cross, Daphne," David pleaded, "I don't often bother you this way, but I wanted you quite alone. You see I know such an awfully nice little room near by, where we can have supper. You don't mind very much, do you?"

Daphne did mind, and she minded very much indeed. There was something about David which puzzled her to-night. His eyes were too bright, he spoke very fast, and there was a restlessness about him which infected her with nervousness. Nevertheless she made an effort, and throwing off her fears, fascinated him, by her delight and joy in the London streets. "Oh! but it's good to get back again!" she cried. "Often in Overham when everyone was saying, 'How you must be enjoying the country life,' I was wondering how much longer I could put up with it, and thirsting for the roar and the crowds, and the lights of London! I get so tired of wearing a uniform too, and Katherine and I can only afford the tops of 'buses. Just looking at me, as I am now, you wouldn't think I was a nurse, would you?"

But what David thought of her at that moment was left unsaid, for a too sharp turn at the corner, brought their horse with a crash against a lumbering four-wheeler. Daphne felt David's arm about her, a sound of broken glass, and his hand before her face. In another moment she was lifted on to the pavement.

"It's all right!" he said, steadily enough, "and we are just here." He gave something to the swearing cabman, and drew her quickly out of the crowd.

Daphne knew suddenly that she would have been very badly hurt if it had not been for David. Then she saw his hand and wrist were bleeding from a cut by the broken glass. "It's just as well you took a nurse out with you," she said smiling, as she tore her handkerchief into strips, and took out a safety pin. "Come under this jewellers' window, David, and I'll fasten you up." She thought he was badly shaken for he stumbled as he crossed the pavement. "After all 'buses are safer," she said, as she neatly fixed the safety pin. "Now let me take your arm, there is such a crowd here!" Daphne's hand on his arm guided him through the crowded Strand. Voices of flower girls, and the scent and sounds, of the streets at night, remained a memory of Daphne's. She was quite conscious that if she had not been guiding David people might have thought him the worse for drink; she was conscious also, as it was, that several people turned and looked after them. She wanted to explain to them that David had just had an accident. She explained it several times to herself. "Now, David," she said, as they reached the lighted doors, "give me the tickets."

He fumbled in his pockets and obeyed. With her light firm hand still on his arm, they reached their seats. She threw off her long cloak, and leaned back with a sigh of relief. The theatre rested her as nothing else could, the orchestra, the lights, the crowds of well-dressed people, seemed to her an assurance that she was quite safe, and quite happy, and that after all, in the best regulated families, accidents didn't happen. The play for the time being swallowed up all her emotions. She was watching a great actor, and it stirred her pulses, and set her brain on fire. The man beside her watched her face, and seldom glanced towards the stage.

"Oh, but David," she said when the curtain went down, "the heroine's a stick, why won't she let herself go?"

"Women are always afraid to do that," said David, "they want everything else to go, and then to be able to say 'no, thank you,' and skip out of the circle of emotions. I never met a good woman yet, who let herself go." His eyes were on her face, and seemed to devour her. Again she felt a sensation as distinct as it was unpleasant, if she had not known David so well she would have thought it fear.

"One must be sure of one's man before one does that," she said lightly.

"Well—are you?" he asked.

The slow colour mounted in the girl's face, she felt her heart speaking in every pulse. Would he see that she was breathless, guess that she was afraid? "Naturally, I trust you, David," she said rather coldly.

"Naturally!" said David, and he laughed. Daphne grew angry, and the next scene passed before she could enter into the spirit of the piece. It was *David Garrick*, and the man by her side was immensely amused at the drunken dinner-party scene. "That man knows what it's like!" he said, as the curtain went down.

"Oh!" said Daphne, "what horrible, loathsome days those were! I—I don't believe I liked that scene, David!"

David laughed. "Why, you little fool!" he said, "it's only acting!"

"David!" exclaimed Daphne in astonishment.

"I beg your pardon," said the man, getting very red. Daphne looked away from him. She was beginning to believe there were some things she did not understand about David. The curtain went down for the last time amidst tremendous applause. David put the cloak around the girl. As he did so he stooped and kissed her bared shoulder. These seats were under the shelter of the boxes. Daphne felt as if he had struck her.

"Never do that again, David!" she said, turning round on him with flashing eyes.

"Oh! all right!" said David awkwardly. They went out into the crowded streets in angry silence.

"Get a hansom and let me drive home, David," she said, "I don't want any supper."

"Oh! but Daphne," he said, "I've ordered it!" He was so evidently disappointed that she changed her mind.

"That was very nice of you," she said gently. "I won't be so ungrateful as not to come then." The restaurant was only a step from the theatre; David led the way upstairs to a private room. It was beautifully appointed, and the little table with its dazzling candles and lovely flowers astonished her.

"Why, what a pretty room it is, David!" she said. "I had no idea restaurants had such lovely private rooms."

"Some of 'em don't," said David. "This is an old friend of mine."

"Then you've been here often," said Daphne, smiling at him across the table. David got up and looked out of the window.

"Daphne, dear," he said, "if you really like me to take you back now, I will, you know."

"Oh, but we must have supper first, since you've ordered it," she said. "We'll be back before twelve o'clock, won't we?"

"Oh, yes!" said David, "of course!" The waiter, a swift and silent individual, came in. Daphne was astonished at the supper, it was exquisitely cooked and served, and the best she had ever tasted. David eat very little, but she noticed he drank a good deal. He did not talk much, and being still a little shaken with silence and the uneasiness of the evening, Daphne talked continuously and nervously, until at last the almost oppressive silence of her host made her catch her breath. She gave a frightened little laugh.

"What is the matter with you, David?" she said; "why won't you speak to me?" and then she wished she had not spoken. He came over and caught her hands.

"Daphne!" he stammered, "Daphne!" She looked into his eyes, and all the inarticulate rose up to meet her. She was afraid now in real earnest, desperately, horribly afraid.

"Oh! my God!" she whispered, "my God! David, let me go! you're—drunk!"

"Damn it!" he muttered between his teeth, "do you think I am the only man who won't get your kisses?" He drew her closer and closer to him, she felt his hot breath on her neck. He was mad with drink and passion, she dared not scream, and she was too far off the bell to ring it. She began to struggle with him, and the pattern of the wall, the carpet, the chairs got caught in her brain, till she saw nothing but these, and the two hands she was so vainly fighting against.

"David!" she moaned, "for God's sake let me go!" He was pressing her backwards, and she knew that behind her was a chair she had admired a little while before; with a quick movement she avoided it, David saw it too late, stumbled and fell. In an instant Daphne was at the open door. Something stopped her from going down into the crowded hall below. She heard voices coming down the passage.

"Most improper *I* call it, goin' with a young man to a theatre at night. I should never let the twins do it if they were twenty times engaged!"

"I wish you wouldn't talk so loud, mother!" the voice was Reggie's.

"Oh, you go 'long!" said his mother, laughing, "and get us some kind of a gee!" Quick steps followed.

"Oh! Reggie!" whispered Daphne into the passage. There was a moment's pause, then he came in quietly, shutting and locking the door after him. David was on his feet again, and the eyes of the two men met in one long, angry gaze. Reggie said nothing at all, but his face had changed from a pleasant boy's, into a firm and steady man's. His eyes looked as cold and fierce, as only blue eyes can look, when they are angry. Daphne, watching him, felt a surprise, almost as strong as her shame, and terror. He took up her cloak which was hanging over a chair.

"You—put that down," said David heavily. Reggie fastened the cloak over her shoulders in silence, then he went up to David and looked at him.

"Come along with me," he said shortly. Daphne stood in wide-eyed terror, expecting some fearful termination to the scene. To her intense surprise David quietly obeyed.

"Stay here, please, till I come back," said Reggie to her over his shoulder, "and lock the door after us." Reggie slipt his arm under David's, and they left her. He came back alone. "I am sorry," he said, "you'll have to wait a few minutes till my people have gone." Then he saw that she was trembling from head to foot. He got very white, crossed to the table, and poured her out some wine. "Take this," he said. Her hands trembled too much to hold the glass, and he knelt down beside her putting it to her lips.

"Reggie," she whispered, "David—poor David was drunk! He didn't mean to be horrible!"

"All right!" he said, "we can go now, but pull that red thing over your face as much as you can."

"Like this?" said Daphne, drawing it low over her dark hair, and looking up at him.

"I daresay that'll do," said Reggie evasively. When they got to the door of the restaurant there was a hansom waiting. "You'll go straight back to the hospital?" he asked.

"Yes, but Reggie," she pleaded, "you won't let me go alone? I'm so frightened!" She caught her breath. He said nothing, but got in beside her. They drove in silence for a little way. "Reggie," she said at last, "I'm still terribly frightened. Won't you hold my hand?"

"All right," said Reggie briefly. She gave a little sigh of relief, remembering how good he had always been to her when she was a little girl and they had stayed together at the seaside, and he had always been willing to lend her his spade. He looked ahead down the lately crowded streets, they were emptier now, only the habitués were still out. He looked at the still blazing lights in the jewellers' windows, he looked in fact everywhere, but at the girl beside him.

"Reggie," she said, "has David ever been like that before?" Reggie said nothing. "Then he—has!" sighed Daphne wearily. "I don't think I could bear to see him again," she said. "Oh, you *don't* think I ought to marry him after this, do you?"

"No! I don't," said Reggie decisively. They had reached the hospital gates. He got out and lifted her down. "Do you feel better now?" he asked, looking at the porter's lodge. Daphne gave a little sigh of relief.

"Reggie!" she said, "do you know, I think I shall join a sisterhood?"

"You'd better go to bed," said Reggie. "I'll see David to-night, and you can write to him yourself to-morrow.

"You have been good to me," she said; "I've always wished you were my younger brother, Reggie."

"A wish that couldn't be granted!" said her companion rather stiffly, "seeing I'm three years older than you are! Good-night!"

She turned and went into the hospital gates. Katherine was asleep, she leaned over her and kissed her. "After all!" she thought, "I have not got to pay the price!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"'I do not see them here; but after death,
God knows I know the faces I shall see,
Each one a murdered self, with low, last breath, 'I am thyself—
What hast thou done to me?'
'And I—and I—thyself' (lo! each one saith), 'And *thou* thyself to all eternity!'"

ROSSETTI.

REGGIE drove straight to David's rooms; his thoughts were troubled but his purpose was clear. It was necessary to look after David. The clock chimed twelve as he reached his friend's chambers and climbed the stairs. David's rooms were some of the best in London, magnificently furnished, with large windows over-looking the park. As Reggie entered he saw his friend sitting in a big arm-chair, gazing stupidly before him.

"What the devil do you want?" he asked thickly, as he eyed the intruder.

"I want a smoke," said Reggie, taking up a cigar and lighting it. A long pause followed.

"What did you do with her," David asked finally.

"Took her to the hospital," said Reggie, puffing at his cigar.

"And left her there?"

"And left her there." David sank morosely into silence again. He was trying to clear his dulled and fettered faculties. Something had happened he knew, something, sad, shameful, terrible, but he could not for the life of him remember what. He was afraid to ask Reggie, for he was not sure that he wanted to find out. Reggie rang the bell. "Bring two cups of coffee, black," he said to the man-servant.

"Do you think I'm drunk?" asked David with sudden fierceness, "for if you do I'll kick you downstairs!"

"These are precious good cigars of yours, David. Where do you get 'em from?" Reggie asked coolly, knocking off some ashes into a tray.

"Best cigars in London," said David. "Best cigars in the world!" he added with much force and gravity. When the man brought in the coffee, David fixed angry eyes upon his companion. Reggie drank his cup with much appreciation.

"Good coffee," he said thoughtfully. David tossed his down thirstily.

"Best coffee in the world!" he exclaimed with fervour. A long uneasy silence followed. Reggie, watching him, saw David's hands clench over the arms of his chair. The dulled look left his eyes and instead, knowledge, memory, and pain drove meaning into every line of his face. An almost passionate self-pity came over him, he turned to Reggie. "But I love her!" he cried, "I love her! I wouldn't hurt a hair of her head! Daphne? Why I worship her! It couldn't have been Daphne, tell me it was some other girl?"

"It was this cursed drink!" said his friend bitterly.

"Oh, curse it! curse it! curse it!" said David starting to his feet. "And give me some more brandy, old boy! I must have some brandy! I can't think! I can't——"

"Hold on!" said Reggie, "you don't want any more, David."

"I tell you I must have it! I shall go mad! Oh, damn you, let me have some brandy!" Reggie pushed him back into his chair, David was trembling all over like a frightened child.

"Not while I'm here, old man!" said Reggie firmly. David struggled for awhile and then gave in.

"I could ring for my man to turn you out," he said sullenly.

"You could, but you're not going to!" said Reggie. They eyed each other for a while. Then David burst out angrily as if his friend were accusing him.

"After all, what's the fuss about? I may have taken a glass too much, but a man can't always be on his guard. It will never happen again, I've learnt my lesson now. I'll write and explain, and as for the rest——"

"I don't wish to hear about the rest," said Reggie rather sharply.

"Well, I only tried to kiss her!" muttered David defensively, "I swear I never meant any harm! I may have been a little rough, but, good God! a man's made out of flesh and blood, and that old hag your mother——" he stopped short. "I'm sorry," he added in apology, "she told me she had seen that surgeon kiss her—the night she promised to be my wife, and we were engaged, a man ought to be allowed to kiss the girl he's engaged to!" Reggie made no answer, and David's mood changed. His friend's silence seemed to show him more plainly than anything the actual case. He strung himself together, and the words that came from him seemed wrung out of his soul. "God forgive me," he said, "she trusted me!" It was probably the first time in his life that he looked at what happened to him, from the aspect of how it affected somebody else, and it could not last more than a minute. "She will never look at me again," he said, and he covered his face with his hands.

Reggie's thoughts became fixed on some words he had seen somewhere, "He found no place for repentance though he sought it carefully and with tears." He had vaguely felt this an injustice, he remembered, now he knew that it was a simple fact. There is more than one way of forfeiting a birth-right, but self-indulgence lies at the root of them all. Esau could find no place for repentance because he had lost the faculty for the search, and Reggie, looking at the wreck of the handsome youth beside him, felt that the inexorable answer to selfish luxury, is a ruined self. David was not a bad man, he had, indeed, not one wholly cruel impulse in him; he was a good fellow, only he was not quite good enough. There are few characters sufficiently strong to retain their true balance, in an atmosphere of comfort surrounded by attainable pleasures, and pleasant-looking sins, of a sort too, which people term "very natural." David's sins were no more than this at first, until they became only too natural, and then he ceased to call them sins.

Reggie, looking at him, had a growing consciousness that the happy, healthy existence which he had hitherto enjoyed, might not really be life at all. He did not go much farther than this, but he felt dissatisfied, and it is a great deal to feel dissatisfied. Three o'clock struck, and he rose to his feet.

"David, old man," he said, "don't you think you'd better get to bed?" David looked up at him with haggard face, and blank, miserable eyes.

"Tell her to forgive me!" he said. "I can't write to her and ask her not to think about me any more. I don't think she'll find it difficult!" he added bitterly. "I'll just sit here and rest for a few minutes longer, then I'll turn in."

Reggie nodded and left him, but he took away the brandy bottle, and said a few words to the valet downstairs. He was a devoted man and understood his master quite well. The moment the door shut David sprang to his feet and, crossing the room with quick, noiseless steps, he opened a little cupboard in the wall. Reggie had taken away the brandy, but this was gin. Gin would do just as well, anything would do just as well that would shut out Daphne's face, and that startled cry of hers "David—you're drunk!"

Dawn rose over the great weary city. The streets that had been practically hidden by the pitying darkness of the night awoke afresh to "The shame that loads the intolerable day."

Lady Cheston came down late to breakfast; she eyed her son's face a little doubtfully. There were stern lines round his mouth which reminded her a little unpleasantly of his father. Life had been made easier for Lady Cheston since her husband's death.

"I should like a few words with you, mother," said Reggie, at last pushing away an untasted breakfast.

"Then I suppose the girls had better go away?" said Lady Cheston resignedly.

"Very much better," said Reggie. The twins, who were most obliging young persons, smiled pleasantly and left the room. "I have been forced to cut down your allowance," said her son gravely, "you will now only have the sum my father left you, the rest I must use for other purposes."

His mother gasped. He had found out and she had been so careful, and he was going to do what he had said. She was a plucky woman, and besides, she wanted to know if it had been worth while, a great deal depended upon that.

"Why?" she asked bluntly.

"Because I find that you have interfered with David's engagement."

"They were both at the theatre last night," said Lady Cheston, "which doesn't look like a break."

"Nevertheless, there has been one," said Reggie. Lady Cheston's eyes fell on her plate, she did not wish her son to see them at that moment, they were too happy. She began to crumble her bread.

"I do not see why you should put it down to my interference," she said. "They were never suited to each other, and now they have found it out."

"And you have helped them to find out," said Reggie. Lady Cheston shrugged her shoulders.

"It would be no use my telling you that I didn't," she said, "because you wouldn't believe me."

"Besides, it is not true," said Reggie quietly. Lady Cheston laughed.

"Where's the *Field?*" she asked, "I must get a Scotch terrier!" Her son handed her the paper, and left the room. Her hand trembled too much to hold it. She went over to a mirror and studied her face. It was true she was forty, but she was a very fine-looking woman still.

"Oh! David! David! David!" she whispered. She knew that for the moment he must hate her, but there would be other moments. In the worst things that she fancied coming up between them, she could never have imagined that he had called her, to her own son, "That cursed old hag!" If she had known of it she would never have understood Reggie's not repeating it to her, and she would have felt just the same to David.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

" Love like a bird hath perched upon a spray,
For thee and me to hearken what he sings,
Contented he forgets to fly away ;
But hush ! . . . remind not Eros of his wings ! "
WATSON.

THE two girls dressed quickly, exchanging no word. Katherine looked at Daphne sharply from time to time, but the work before them both warned her to touch on nothing but the external. She ventured on a " You're tired ? " as they hurried down to breakfast. Daphne stared at her.

" My dear," she said, " I am tired right through to my soul." Katherine laughed ; she was used to her extravagances.

Nevertheless she felt uneasily that some things were different. Daphne had thrown off her sweet manner, little bitter things came to her lips all the morning, and the young dresser who adored her got tossed down precipices of blackness by a withering snub. Katherine had often counselled her friend to be less charming in her ways, now she would have given a great deal to catch her in a pretty insincerity, instead Daphne was cuttingly truthful.

"Do you think I shall make a good nurse?" a new arrival asked her.

"I don't know what you'll be in the next world," said Daphne, "but you'll never be a nurse in this!" Katherine gasped. At tea-time she attacked her.

"What happened last night, Daphne?" she asked sternly.

"Last night," said Daphne, "I realized that I had been insulted by a man who was supposed to be in love with me. It was a dose to my self-conceit. I thought I understood David, and I found I had left out an important ingredient in his composition. It will make very little difference as far as he is concerned, as it will put him out of my life; but in my dealings with mankind in the future, I must reckon on the ingredient David introduced me to! Must things always happen before one can see?" she added passionately. "I thought I knew most things and was prepared to face them, yet a child on the streets knows more of life than I do!"

"I thought you understood," said Katherine, "and were pretending that you didn't mind, and I thought that Arthur Field——"

"Ah, no!" interrupted Daphne, "Arthur never taught me those kinds of things! I remember his saying to me once, 'Daphne, your ignorance of passion amounts to genius,' but it isn't the things a man says that makes you see, it's what they mean, and show that they mean quite wordlessly—David was drunk! and even *that* I didn't know! One seems to have been given instincts to act as warnings, only they don't go far enough to tell us what we are being warned against! It's time I went back to work again, I suppose? Has Sister had her tea yet?"

"Yes," said Katherine.

"Katherine," Daphne asked suddenly, "is it because I am not really good that it has happened?" Her friend looked at her very tenderly.

"Not quite that," she said, "only you do make things terribly difficult, Daphne. Couldn't you be more impersonal somehow? I can't explain exactly, but people get awfully fond of you, and you do and say the very things, to make them worse."

"But I like people to be fond of me if they would stop at the right place."

"Well, they won't," said Katherine, "if you mean the place that you want them to stop at."

"You're off now, aren't you?" said Daphne, preparing to return to her ward. "Katherine, I believe you see things very plainly."

"I sometimes see very plain things," said Katherine quietly. The maid announced a visitor for her.

"Let us hope this is not one of them!" laughed Daphne.

"It is a gentleman, Miss," said the maid importantly.

Katherine walked into the nurses' sitting-room.

"Philip!" she exclaimed. Mr. Mitchell shook hands with her very warmly.

"I hoped you wouldn't mind my coming here to see you," he said; "I've got my work at last, an East-end curacy." They sat down opposite each other.

"Tell me about it," said Katherine.

Philip Mitchell gave a sigh of content. She was a picture of what he had all his life missed, a sympathetic and strongly sensible woman; that she was good to look at as well, did not take away from the value of the picture. There were other nurses sitting, and standing about the room. All of them looked tired, and some of them looked inquisitive.

"If you have time, won't you come out?" he asked.

"I have two hours," she said, and left him to get her things on.

A part of her previous history he knew from Mr. Fordington. When he had heard of her mother's marriage, he had wanted immeasurably to put the unspoken feelings, that had grown up between them on a solid basis, but he knew her too well to imagine she would listen to him just then. She must, first of all, prove her soul in the work she found to do, before she would be ready to help him in his. He had still a scruple as to a married priesthood, but it was a scruple which love of Katherine had worn thin. Now he felt sure as he looked at her in her plain and serviceable uniform, that she was quite as competent to be a slum-worker as himself. It was after all one thing to give up love for one's work, and quite another and a foolishly impossible thing, to give up a love that would act as a stimulant to one's work. As he waited for Katherine he assured himself of this, and looked curiously at her sister nurses. They talked slang over his head and lolled about, he noticed; he was not sure that he thought such things as they must live amongst quite suitable for women. Katherine appeared.

"Come along," she said shortly. When they entered the street, she looked up at him and smiled. "I should not have done this for anybody but you," she said; "I shall get awfully chaffed about you!"

Philip frowned. "Who by?" he asked almost angrily.

"Oh! all the nurses!" said Katherine. "Would you like to bite their heads off, for mentioning your name?"

"If they mention yours as well I'll forgive them," said Philip; "all the same I think it's not quite a profession for *young* women, Katherine."

"Now I wonder why you think that?" she asked him.

"They must see a side of life which they would be better without," said Philip. Katherine looked at him thoughtfully.

"You are a good man, Philip," she said, "but there would be more good men I think, if young women knew 'sides of life' as you call them. Our ignorance fights against the very good we desire."

"I do not consider this a fit matter for discussion," said Philip stiffly. Katherine smiled at him good-humouredly.

"Oh, well!" she said, "we won't quarrel over my sex's limits on our first afternoon, and you shall discuss only the most respectable subjects. We can begin on the thirty-nine articles if you like. Can we take a 'bus?" He hailed a green one, and they climbed to the top. It was a perfect evening early in July. Great water carts had laid the dust of the streets, and all the folk of the city, had drifted out in cool garments on to the pavement. Men were in their shirt sleeves smoking, girls walked arm in arm up and down the street, house-wives haggled over piled up barrows for to-morrow's dinner. It was a Saturday evening, and the world was given up to summer thoughts and ways. The two on the 'bus-top watched, with new eagerness, the crowds below them.

"They are sordid," Philip said, "but how they are alive! Look at that girl with a baby in her arms, hasn't she got a soul?"

"She has got a baby," said Katherine smiling, "and that makes most women, half-way to being Madonnas." Philip looked at her gently.

"I did not know you were so fond of children, Katherine," he said. Katherine blushed furiously, she hated to show her feelings, and the intensest of them all, was her passion of motherhood.

"I said 'most women,'" she said rather shortly. "Is your parish like this?" He gave her an earnest and sanguine outline of what it was, and what he meant it should be. She watched him with silent interest; she felt that he was far too hopeful, but that was a fault that time would soon cure.

"Your work is one," she said at last, "in which you ought to have no self-love, a very deep purse, and a little judgment wouldn't be a bad thing either, Philip."

"You think I have none?" he asked ruefully.

"I was only wondering whether you would know when you were taken in," she said. He looked a trifle indignant. "Don't ever be angry when you are," she said, "even with yourself, for it blinds one as to what to do next."

"Have you any other advice to offer me?" he asked a little stiffly. Katherine laughed so merrily that the 'bus driver turned his head and smiled at her. Katherine, to Philip's horror, smiled and nodded back.

"You must learn to laugh, Philip," she said, "or you will break your heart, and you mustn't mind 'bus drivers!" Philip changed the subject.

"We get out here," he said. To his amazement Katherine was down and off the 'bus before he had had time to signal to the 'bus driver to stop; he was a little awkward in following her. "You should never do that," he said disapprovingly, "it's very dangerous."

"How long did you say you had been in London?" Katherine asked, as they turned into a narrow street where the people were all on the steps.

Philip was not sure that after all a celibate priesthood was not the better part. "The parish begins here," he said rather shortly. Katherine glanced down a net-work of alleys, broken into by tenement courts, and finished off at the corners by public houses, none of which on this summer evening were empty. There were callings of fretful babies, and the sharp tongues of exasperated mothers, with the usual asides that if Tom didn't stop making that row, his neck would be wrung, or some equally strong and final operation performed on him. Katherine imagined it was not a bad quarter. There were plants in the windows, and a smell of steak floated out of one of the doors. Two loud-voiced women at the end of the street advanced sharply towards each other. There was a moment's preliminary language, and then, to Katherine's amusement, and Philip's horror, the fight began.

One woman, standing back for a moment, launched herself in growling fury upon the other, who clawed at her with a skill, won through many encounters. A small crowd gathered around them, and called out encouraging expletives, gave hints as to the handling of hair, and advised the stouter of the two to "come down on 'er like a feather-bed." Philip cast an anxious glance at his companion. He looked white and troubled.

"I must separate them," he said. "I am so sorry to have brought you here!" Katherine smiled.

"You may need my services afterwards," she said. "It is just as well I came."

He hardly heard her, for in a moment he had pushed his way through the crowd. "Mrs. McCullen!" he gasped in horror, catching the fat woman by the shoulder. This worthy lady who was getting the worst of the encounter, sat down heavily upon the pavement and began to dab her scratched face with a dirty apron. The other woman, of an alert and wiry nature, finding nothing for the work of her hands to do, lifted up a high and piercing voice, and began to describe her opponent, starting with her entry into the world, and ending up with her final destination beyond it.

Someone made an offer to Philip, that if he would fork out a bob, they would stop her jaw, but he refused shortly and bent, in wretched disappointment, over the woman on the pavement.

"Oh! Mrs. McCullen, how did this come about?" he exclaimed, "and you were at church on Sunday, too!"

"Wot if I were?" exclaimed the indignant lady, with a savage glance at her enemy. "Is she to call me a mongrel? Me, that lived h'on this 'ere street one-and-twenty years come Monday! D'ye think it likely, *h'an'* my pore 'usband in the grave, h'an' my daughter 'ead 'ouse-maid in the West h'end!"

"Ho! that's where you belong, h'is it?" shrieked her opponent with a jeer; "thought ye seemed a bit h'out of plice in this 'ere street, more h'at 'ome in Buckingham Palace, *I* believe. Want to sit in h'a golden droreing room that's what *you* want—h'oh, I knows 'ere——" Philip held up his hand and turned and looked at the woman, something in the pained boyishness of his expression touched her. "I'm not blaming you, sir!" she said, "we h'all knows what Mrs. McCullen is—nasty drunken drab!"

"Hi'll lern ye to call me nimes!" shrieked Mrs. McCullen, who had now got her second wind and was on her feet. Philip held her back.

"Mrs. McCullen!" he said, "you will be sorry for this to-morrow! you, a Christian woman, trying to fight like this! I am ashamed of you."

"Be ashamed of ye'self!" grumbled Mrs. McCullen sullenly, but she made no fresh attempts on her late companion, and retreated scowling into her own room, whacking an inoffensive baby playing with a tin can on her steps. If the mother had been present hostilities would have been renewed, but she was (for this event) fortunately in the public house. The baby clung to the can, and picking itself up unconcernedly, toddled off to another step. It was probably accustomed to a cup-and-ball existence.

Philip turned to the other woman. "Why should you quarrel with your neighbour?" he asked gently, "it seems such a pity."

"She said as 'ow my 'usband was no class!" grumbled the other woman, "cos 'e comes 'ome drunk! Lor! what d'ye expect? Don't they all? She's been so long without an 'usband she forgot! h'i told 'er *that*, too!" she added with relish. It was a sting that had gone home. "H'and I h'added that she were a mongrel, h'and so she be, sir!" Philip looked perplexed.

"I hope you will never do so again!" he said. "Think, if you have any children, what a bad example it must be for them to see their mother quarrelling with her neighbour!" The woman hung her head. The crowd had dispersed long ago, and Katherine had joined them.

"That's a pretty little girl you have behind you," she said. "Is she yours?"

"Yes, Miss!" said the woman, dragging the child in front of her. "Oh! but she's a dirty little girl," she said in a lighter tone, "I don't like for you to see 'er." Philip's face brightened.

"I do not know what your name is," he said, "but I will come and see you to-morrow; I hope your little girl will grow up a good one." The woman looked at him sharply.

"H'i was married in church, sir!" she said.

"I must go now," Katherine said to Philip quietly.

"Can't you even come to see my church?" he asked.

"I will come some Sunday with Daphne," said Katherine. "Philip, what do you think about that woman?"

"She seems respectable," said Philip, "but the drunken brute of a husband has got on her nerves! Ah! the lives those women lead!"

"The lives we all lead!" said Katherine, "fighting for our destinies in the dark!" His face grew radiant.

"With the certainty of Light Eternal!" he said firmly. "Oh, Katherine, it has been ringing so in my mind, 'Beloved, love one another!' After all, it is simply in our love of the poor brother whom we *have* seen, that the love of the Father whom we have not seen is revealed to us! It was Mr. Fordington who always said, 'We are unspiritual because we are *unreal* about what we see. When we are honest with the things in sight, the out of sight will rush in on one, in full reality!' Tell me, could you do your work without an intense love?" Katherine hesitated.

"I think it teaches love," she said, "but only as a disciplined emotion, one must never let one's heart go without one's common sense."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"One mustn't think well of people because one feels kindly towards them," she explained, "but one must go on feeling kindly towards them in spite of their not doing well. Then one doesn't get disappointed, for they are sure not to do well!" He looked at her a little severely.

"You look too much on the dark side!" he pronounced.

"All right!" laughed Katherine as she caught her 'bus, "only don't forget that the dark side is a large one!"

Philip was sick of heart that night over Mrs. McCullen, who passed him reeling drunk. First enthusiasm gets bitterly depressed, and only a strong will and much courage get the better of depression. Katherine told Daphne of the incident.

"Do you know you could not have told me all that," she said, "if you had been really in love with him?" Katherine looked away. She was cutting bread and butter for the patients' supper, and a sharp exclamation of anger from the Sister, who was passing through the kitchen, showed her she had nearly cut herself. "I said, 'Cut *bread*,'" the Sister reminded her.

"Daphne," said Katherine with much emphasis, after the sister had passed them, "I don't! I thought I did, but something has changed me, and the worst of it is, I don't know *what!*"

"Perhaps that isn't the worst of it," said Daphne, and Katherine did not ask her to explain.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Dome up, O heavens ! yet higher o'er my head ;
Back, back, horizon ! widen out my world ;
Rush in, O infinite sea of the Unknown !
For though He slay me, I will trust in God."

GEORGE MCDONALD.

IT was evening, and the heat was more terrible because of the darkness, the stones were hot to the touch of one's feet: the very shadows seemed a mockery and a delusion. The air that hung above the hospital had a pressure, and a thickness, that made breathing an intolerable burden.

Katherine, sitting by the open window within sight of a great market, wondered how she had been able to keep on her feet all day ; now it seemed almost too much of a struggle even to wonder.

The door opened, and Daphne came into the room. At first Katherine did not see her face ; when she did, she started to her feet.

"What is the matter?" she asked quickly. Daphne sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands ; she was trembling from head to foot.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she gasped. "I can't bear to die! I can't—die!" For a moment Katherine thought she had gone mad.

"What are you talking about?" she asked her.

"Sister said I was to go to him, but she did not tell me!" Daphne moaned incoherently. "Only his face—Katherine, his face! He gasped as I lent over him, 'Don't let me die, nurse!' And he kept muttering 'I'm only nineteen! I'm only nineteen!' And then he began to struggle, and the terror in his eyes! Oh! Katherine, I never saw such terror in anybody's eyes before! and I couldn't think what to say to him! I asked him if he wanted to pray to God, and he said 'I don't want God—I want to live!' And I saw he couldn't! It seemed as if there was really someone struggling with the spark of life in him, and he died fighting it, died with that frightful look of terror in his eyes." She rose to her feet and began walking up and down hurriedly in the tiny room. "I didn't know it was like that!" she said. "Think! It is summer-time, and somewhere there is sea, and coolness, and roses, and he was only nineteen! They say it is a beautiful world, but it isn't! It's cruel! It's simply cruel! to let him die like that when he was fighting so, to send his soul out of his fine young body into the dark! Oh! I am afraid! It is all going on the same—nobody knows, nobody cares, and all around us is this struggle between our weak, impotent lives, and this cruel, masterful death! picking us—oh! so short sometimes, like a heedless child in a field of flowers, only to throw them away! Katherine, *you* have got to die! And I? Oh, I don't want to! I wish I had never been born, and no one can help us! We have to go out alone, and we don't know *what* is on the Other Side! Arthur said he had fifteen years more work, and then he would drop in his tracks, only fifteen years, and I—perhaps I may not have so long." Daphne's face was working terribly—she was completely unnerved and worn out. Katherine blamed herself bitterly for not having taken more care of her.

"Anyway, you're not dying now!" she said, "so you had better sit down and get rested; it is much too hot to run up and down the room!" Daphne obeyed her listlessly.

"Nothing is worth while!" she said. "I might have married David, or gone to Arthur! When Dora died it nearly broke my heart, but I wasn't frightened, now——" she began to shiver again. "I can't go back to the ward!" she muttered, "I can't face them again, they might—die! I tell you it's the end!" she cried fiercely to Katherine. "It's the end! the end! I don't believe in Heaven, and Hell is here! To have love and beauty, and the gifts of life, and then be robbed of them one by one, and last of all hustled out of one's own familiar world! And then you ask me to believe in something else!" Katherine looked at her in blank astonishment; this was a Daphne whom she did not know.

"God gave them to you, and so can't you believe He has got something better for you as well?" she asked at last, and Katherine smiled at her.

"You have had so much love," she said, "and that is the way to Eternity, and the consolation for all that is beautiful which seems to perish. Surely you understand?"

"What do you mean by love?" Daphne asked angrily. "Arthur's profession coming before his heart, or David's fits of passion, or Philip Mitchell's spiritual twaddle?" Katherine's eyes flashed.

"I have loved you, Daphne," she said.

"Thank you!" said Daphne. "What is a girl's love for another girl, but a kind of make-shift before the bridge is built? Do you suppose I love *you*, as you call it? I can assure you, you have frequently bored me to death!"

"I will be more careful in the future," said Katherine.

Daphne laughed. "Future?" she questioned—"is there to be a future?"

"It is ten o'clock," said Katherine quietly, "and I am going to bed." Daphne held out her arms to her.

"I didn't mean it!" she cried, "not one single, cruel word of it! It was only those eyes, that poor boy's eyes!" And she began to cry. Katherine held her hands and soothed her, as she would a frightened child. Later she prayed, and Daphne knelt by her gazing out of the window across the hot roofs and heavy London sky. For the first time in her life she felt the call of green fields, and quiet country lanes, for the pureness of the sky, and the clear air, and all the life of trees, and birds, and flowers. She began to think about her uncle and Dora; as she knelt she became aware that he had loved her, and that she had been very cruel to leave him when he needed her most. Words and thoughts of his came back to her, that she had never really understood, and she began to ponder them in her heart. She remembered once she had been very angry with him; they had been sitting in his study, and he had turned to her and said, "Daphne, I know what you are thinking about?" She had questioned him, and he had answered very sadly. "You are thinking of yourself. One day you will have to stop doing that." Now she knew that the time had come. The life behind her became a terrible burden even to think of. One got paid for selfishness (she thought) by Death, for pleasure by satiety, for luxury by ruin, for scepticism by despair, and for the love of others by vanity of heart.

Katherine was in bed, but Daphne knelt on, forgetting everything but the new vision that was born in her.

"Katherine," she asked, "are you awake?"

"Yes," said her friend sleepily.

"I was afraid of Death," said Daphne, "because I was not alive. I believe I know now what it is to be alive."

"Well, you'd better go to sleep," said Katherine. Daphne smiled to herself in the dark.

"Oh! no!" she said, "I am going to wake up now."

CHAPTER XXX.

> " Yet, ah ! that Spring should vanish with the Rose ;
> That youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close !
> The nightingale that in the branches sang—
> Ah, whence and whither flown again who knows ! "
>
> RUBAIYAT.

HE had made up his mind not to think about Katherine, so that when he actually met her in an A. B. C. he felt that the reward of his decision was clear. She looked tired and white, and he ordered a succession of ices for each of them.

" In this country," he said, " you have your luxuries in egg-cups, so the only way is to get a lot of egg-cups. I think perhaps that is the real reason why English people take their pleasure sadly—you see, they are always coming to the bottom of the egg-cup. In fact, you ought to go for a holiday, which proves my point."

Katherine hoped his nonsense had covered her visible embarrassment at the sight of him. It had covered it, but he had seen it, and he knew better than Katherine did what it meant.

The sun burnt through the window of the dull little shop, the sugar trickled off the buns, the butter floated. The girls who lounged about the small tables made the idea of eating difficult. A young man in a billy-cock hat sucked lemon-squash, through a straw.

The American enjoyed the scene before him. "Oh! it's good! it's good," he said. "Think of this in the heart of London—and it pays."

"Why shouldn't it pay?" said Katherine crossly.

"If you came here oftener it would pay more," said Bert Russell audaciously. Katherine looked steadily before her.

"I shall not come here again," she said.

"Then where shall we go?" he asked.

"You can go where you please," she replied with irritation, "and I shall go somewhere else." They both laughed, but Bert Russell, remembering the look of unwilling welcome in the girl's eyes, made the mistake of supposing she knew it also.

"I have been looking for you for some twenty-eight years," he said. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I should suggest that you wasted no more time," said Katherine.

"That's what I feel about it myself," said Bert. "Will you have another ice in honour of your decision?"

"You are wilfully misunderstanding me" said

Katherine angrily. "I have never liked, nor trusted you. If you will force me to tell you unpleasant truths, I cannot help it. You have no right to jest with me on—on such subjects!"

"Pardon me, I was not jesting," said Bert with a queer little smile. "I was only proposing to you, and the laugh is all on your side."

The young man with the lemon-squash pushed back his chair with a noisy squeak, and began to tease one of the girls across the counter. Their nasal voices made Katherine wince.

"Then you might have found a simpler way of doing it," she said, "but it makes no difference. I am sorry I cannot marry you." She had not meant to speak so brutally, but she was hurting herself as well as him, and it is not easy to hurt oneself gracefully.

"And you neither like nor trust me?" he said thoughtfully. Katherine did not answer him. "Well, thank you, Miss Linton, for being frank; it saves ever so much time. You won't have another ice?"

"No," said Katherine. "Mr. Russell?"

"Yes, Miss Linton."

"I do like and trust you, but it doesn't make any difference!" Bert Russell laughed.

"It makes a lot of difference to me," he said, "I can assure you!"

"It doesn't to what we have just been talking about," persisted Katherine.

"Maybe we can be friends?" he asked lightly, "or brothers?" Katherine frowned.

"It might lead to mistakes," she said.

"I believe in the policy of the open-door," he said. "Some day the right person walks in. Anyway, it's much more hospitable, don't you think?"

"Well, I sometimes come to tea here on Tuesdays," said Katherine.

"Good," said the American. "It's a fine place to come to."

The young man at the counter said something to the girl which made her giggle. Katherine walked out of the shop. As they turned towards the hospital they were stopped, by one of those swiftly-forming little London crowds. On the pavement, surrounded by their pressing figures, was a very well-dressed woman, who might have been good-looking—only she was drunk. Katherine and her companion made their way to her side.

"Let us take her somewhere," said the American, "before a policeman comes." He tipped a bystander, and a cab appeared. Somehow they got her into it.

The heat and the glare of the day made the world terrible—a world in which such a thing could easily happen. The crowd dispersed as the cab drove away, and a policeman sauntered up.

"We were just in time," said Bert with relief.

"And now will you tell me what you are going to do?" asked Katherine with some asperity. "In half-an-hour's time I am due in the ward. This——" she hesitated as she looked at the heavy, inanimate figure he was supporting, "this woman is completely helpless and will remain so for some hours. She is probably an actress," glancing at her clothes.

"She ought to have a card somewhere about her," said Bert Russell. "Why—here is one in her pocket-book. My gracious! Miss Linton," he said aghast, "she's Mrs. Arthur Field!" The two gazed at each other in a communion of horror. Why, in all the world, had this black secret come to them? The stern, indomitable face of the surgeon rose up between them, and the weak, lost loveliness of the woman was in itself an appeal, and an explanation. "We must take her to her husband," said the American.

"Ah, poor fellow," said Katherine. They drove in silence through the noise and glare, of the great city, shrouded in the stillness of a human mystery, unseeing and unhearing. They arrived at the impressively blank house where the surgeon lived, before they had framed an explanation.

The maid told them Mr. Field was engaged, but would be free in a few minutes. "People did not usually see him without an appointment," she added, looking suspiciously at the nurse and the young man.

"The nurse has brought a patient of Mr. Field's to him; she is in the cab, but unfortunately she has fainted. Will you kindly find us a private room. I take all the responsibility of settling affairs with Mr.

Field," said the American. "The case is urgent," he added in an undertone, handing her a sovereign. The maid nodded.

The nurse had roused the woman to a stumbling consciousness; they managed between them to get her into the house. The maid's suspicion deepened, and a further proof of another sovereign was needed before the private room was found. Katherine looked at her watch, and Bert Russell took her back to the cab. At the door she gave him her hand.

"I can't bear leaving you to face it alone," she said.

"Ah!—now I wonder why?" asked Bert Russell, smiling. Katherine withdrew her hand sharply.

As the cab drove off she leaned to him out of the window. "Good-bye," she said, "and thank you." Bert went back to his post.

The woman had been more or less roused, but she was still only half-conscious; sometimes she muttered and tossed to and fro in her sleep. She had such pretty hands. The minutes were heavier and longer than hours. Once, through a partition at the end of the room, he heard a woman's voice.

"Then, Mr. Field, you would suggest a winter abroad?"

"I never suggest, madam, I merely state what is necessary."

"It will be very expensive," said the lady.

"That has nothing whatever to do with me," he replied a little brutally.

He heard the door close sharply, and a moment later a quick, decisive tread stopped at the door of the room, and the surgeon entered.

" May I ask the meaning of this intrusion, sir? " he asked in a short, hard voice. Then he saw the woman on the sofa. He stood quite still for a moment, and swayed a little. The storm had burst upon him, and he was not quite ready for the storm. Yet the thought came to him even then with a rush of gladness that Daphne had been spared this. " Ah! " he said, coming swiftly forward, " my wife, sir." He looked down at her with passionate loathing and anger in his eyes. As Bert Russell watched him, he saw the clear-cut mouth quiver once, as if old memories were tugging at his heart; his eyes grew soft, and he turned to the young man. " I think I have met you before? " he said.

" At Lady Middleton's," said the American.

" Yes," said Mr. Field, " I remember. May I ask you where you met my wife? " Bert explained. The surgeon raised his eyebrows. " Do you often do these things? " he asked; " must be a little awkward at times? " Bert smiled.

" Why, no! " he said, " I don't find it so. It was lucky I saw her card."

" Was there anyone with you? " Mr. Field questioned. Bert hesitated.

" A lady," he said finally.

" Ah," said the surgeon, " I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Russell." Bert rose to his feet, and the two men looked at each other. Suddenly the woman on the sofa screamed "Arthur." Mr. Field winced, then he walked to the door with Bert, with his back to the sofa. When he had gone, Arthur turned to his wife and sat down near the sofa. The sight of him and her surroundings brought her back to herself; she began to whimper:

"I didn't mean to come here, Arthur. It was all an accident. Nurse and I came up for a change only for a night or two—and we went shopping, we missed each other somehow—and I got faint with the heat and had to have some brandy; it went to my head, I think, and I became unconscious, so—so someone brought me here—I am sure I don't know how they knew where to come."

"Providentially you had a card-case with my name on," he said drily. "If it had not been so you would have been taken to a police station, you know. That would have been a new experience, wouldn't it? We might try it next time!"

"Oh, Arthur! how unkind," sobbed his wife. Then she looked up at him. "Where am I to go?" she said quickly—"not to another dreadful Home?"

"On the contrary," he said, "we will try this—home, and I hope you will find it a pleasant one!" Rosamonde drew back and laughed hysterically.

"You're—you're joking!" she said.

"My dear Rosamonde," said her husband, "I never joke. I thought you knew that."

"But people will find out," she whispered breathlessly—"they will talk."

"Yes," said Arthur, "they probably will."

"I thought it would ruin you," she said.

"I don't think so now," said Arthur. "I am going to give you another chance," he said gently. "You are only twenty-eight—you used to be beautiful; you may be again, if you get the better of your trouble. You will live in this house with your nurse, as before, only this time under my name, and I shall be within call. Another thing, Rosamonde, if you fail again, I shall punish you, but I shall go on keeping you. I shall never let you go again. I am going to conquer this thing. Are you going to help me?" He spoke with a repressed force that frightened her. She looked at him with dull, curious eyes. He bent forward and, placing his arm around her, he took her across the room to a mirror. She looked at herself speechlessly, then she struggled to escape from the horror in the glass. He held her there for a minute, then, placing her on the sofa, he crossed the room, and came back to her with a photograph of a beautiful girl of eighteen. "These are both you, Rosamonde," he said. "I am going to give you this photograph to keep; some day you may be like it again."

"Oh, Arthur," she whispered, "I'll try." He rang the bell. The maid, looking more curious than ever, answered the door.

"You will prepare the spare room for Mrs. Field, and the dressing-room next door for a nurse. Mrs. Field is an invalid; she will therefore not take over the housekeeping at present," said the surgeon in his usual, quick, imperative tones. Then he went into his study. He took the picture of Daphne off his table and quietly tore it to pieces. He telephoned for a trustworthy nurse, and requested that the nurse he had had before should be dismissed from her association. Then he sank like an old man into his chair. "Only another few years now," he muttered, "and another shock like this may set me free."

It was not known in medical circles that the great surgeon suffered from an obscure and fatal disease. But the man himself knew it, and studied his own case day by day, noting its interesting symptoms and bearing its peculiarly absorbing pain. For a few hours he sat quite grey, and still, in his private consulting room. Then, as evening came on, in a sudden rush of summer rain, his breath came more easily, and he rose to his feet, swaying a little as he stood erect. There came a knock at his door. It was his housekeeper, a woman of rigid principle with a real attachment to him; he had saved her life a few years before.

"If you please, sir, I should like to leave," she said; she had been crying and was ready to begin again.

He stared at her scarcely out of the dumb valley of his pain.

"Very well," he said shortly. She had meant to pour out explanations and reproaches, and possibly to recant at the end. Now she was too frightened to speak and went downstairs to tell the other servants "That master looked white as a ghost."

After she had gone Arthur turned on the electric light. "And now I am alone," he said, and then, with half a smile, he quoted to himself, "I was ever a fighter"; so one fight more, the best and the last. The shower lashed down the dust of the streets, and the burning day died in a mist of rain.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Everyone is as God made him, and very often worse."
SPANISH PROVERB.

"VERA, you must see her, you must try to help her!" cried Daphne, with a force and vigour which rang through the drawing-room like a trumpet call. Lady Middleton sighed, she did not care for trumpet calls in her drawing-room, she preferred low, musical laughs, and a quiet drawl.

"Daphne, dear," she said, "there is always a footman, and you invariably overlook his possibility. I am sure you must be a Socialist at heart."

"But Vera, she only needs a helping hand. It could hardly hurt you to have her to tea, and Arthur is doing all he can, only there are so few things a man *can* do! You might take her out shopping, or give her a lunch-party, mightn't you?" Lady Middleton felt distinctly uncomfortable and, naturally, knowing that she had done nothing to deserve discomfort, she became aggrieved.

"I really think it is very hard on me," she said.

"People always say I have done so much good, and I gave ten pounds to that young man Mitchell only the other day for a slum chapel, yet you break off your engagement to the catch of the season, and Arthur Field disappoints all my expectations."

"You are not very logical," said Daphne bitterly, "you wish me to marry a drunkard and yet you won't receive your sister who——" Vera seldom looked angry, when she did her eyes appeared small. They appeared very small indeed at this moment, and she interrupted Daphne, by dropping a cup.

"It was really good china," she said, looking at the pieces regretfully. "Don't say any more, Daphne, unless you know how to put things more carefully. I have always said there ought to be societies for those sort of people, with Homes. I should be quite willing to help support her at one of them. As for David, a husband is a different thing. You need never have known anything about it, if you had gone about properly chaperoned. All one really needs is a beaten track. You have stepped out of it, and so uncomfortable things have happened. Very few men would marry you now, suitable men I mean. It is no use offering you advice, or I should say return to your uncle and find a curate."

"And you won't help Rosamonde?" said Daphne, buttoning up her gloves. Lady Middleton put her hand up to her hair. It was all so unpleasant.

"If I could do her any *real* good!" she said, "I don't mind calling some morning, she might like to do things for a bazaar; besides, I know a book on the 'Power of the Will over Vice,' I might lend her that, but it would be impossible for me to receive her here. She couldn't expect it of me, it would be so exceedingly awkward. Besides," added Lady Middleton virtuously, "I don't think that sort of thing ought to be encouraged. She is my own sister, but the sin is just the same." Lady Middleton took out her pocket-handkerchief, it was edged with beautiful lace. "Dear child," she said, "your young, fresh mind cannot understand, I have intense principles——"

"You have intensely selfish ones!" cried Daphne with blazing eyes.

"Lady Cheston, my lady!" Lady Cheston emitted a sharp, friendly shriek, and tapped both the women on the shoulder with the handle of her fan.

"Positively dyin' for tea, Vera," she began. "That dreadful old hag, Mrs. Rounceman, has been talkin' to me about her children for an hour. Only dumb people ought to have children, it's so fatiguin', and this hot weather, too—I told her finally that I loved Reggie when he was at Eton, but I only *talked* about him in the Christmas holidays! What's the matter with you, child?" she said, turning upon Daphne suddenly. "You haven't got a family so you needn't be dumb! And now I come to look at you, you're angry! Has Vera been talking sense to you? People oughtn't to talk sense except in Advent.

That's the time we're meant to meditate on the four last things, you know." Daphne rose to her feet. Her mission had failed. Looking from one to the other of them, she knew why.

"Yes," she said, "Vera has been talking sense to me, only I wasn't quite sure what to call it. I am not so good at finding names for things as you are, Lady Cheston!"

"Don't get sharp-tongued, my dear," said Lady Cheston, "leave that to old women like me who have to keep up a second complexion. Don't you find yours, awfully tryin' this weather, Vera?" Vera looked dreamily at the sugar-tongs.

"Two lumps, dear?" she questioned.

Daphne left the room in all the hot disgust of indignant youth. It is so easy to sit in the seat of the scornful, when one is under twenty-five. Wandering about in the hall as if it belonged to someone else, and he was not altogether sure that he might not be turned out, she found Sir Henry Middleton. He was a young man with a very fair moustache. Daphne was exceedingly sorry for him.

"Sir Henry," she said, "why aren't you in Scotland?" He shook hands with her heartily.

"Well, I'm very glad I'm not," he said cordially, "at this present moment. Fact is, I'm waiting for Vera, something has got to come off first. I'm not quite sure what, but the kind of thing that does come off, you know."

"Oh, yes! I know!" said Daphne sympathetically.

"I hope you won't mind," the young man began nervously, "but I've something to say to you. It's jolly awkward having things to say, isn't it?"

"Horrid," said Daphne, "but are you quite sure you have got to say it?"

"Well, yes," he said, "it's about—it's about——" he hesitated painfully.

"Vera?" questioned Daphne.

"In a way—yes," he said. "It seems she had a sister. I didn't know; who married that chap Field who used to be about so much, do you remember?"

"Yes," said Daphne, "I remember."

"Well, you see," he went on, pushing a rug over with his foot, "Vera's queer about it. Won't have her here, shut me up when I talked about her, and it doesn't seem quite fair, you know, does it—one's own sister? Unless she's come an awful cropper, of course. So the long and short of it is, do you know what's wrong? I don't want you to tell me out-and-out, but if it's too bad, then it's all right you see," he finished lamely.

"And if it isn't?" Daphne questioned.

"Oh! well, then I must fairly make a row," said Sir Henry sturdily. Daphne's eyes shone with pleasure, she had not known that he had anything in him.

"She is fighting hard against her troubles," she said finally, "and a helping hand from Vera might put her straight. Perhaps I had better tell you what it is after all—she drinks." Sir Henry gave a low whistle. "Oh, yes! I know," said Daphne impatiently, "a man takes a glass too much and you call him a good fellow, when a woman does you whistle, and the whistle keeps the door shut."

"No, it doesn't," said Sir Henry. Daphne held out her hand to him.

"Then you're a better man than most," she said warmly. "Only don't make a row. Send her one of Vera's invitation cards to the ball. That's what is coming off next week."

"Yes, and a jolly nuisance it is," said her host.

"Well, will you do it?" said Daphne, "and introduce her to all Vera's friends as her sister? She'll be bound to recognize her after that."

"By Jove!" said the startled young man, "but you're fairly knowing!" Daphne frowned.

"Will you?" she repeated.

"There'll be the devil to pay you know," he mused helplessly.

"Well—pay him then," said Daphne sharply, "if that's where you owe it!"

"All right!" said the young man, straightening his shoulders, "I will."

"Do you know," said Daphne very softly, "I am so sorry you ever married Vera."

"Oh, come! come!" the young man exclaimed with a vague gentleness. Daphne turned to the door with tears in her eyes.

"Good-bye!" she said.

When the door closed, the young man looked after her for a moment: he also was very sorry that he had married Vera.

CHAPTER XXXII.

" . . . . Lord, if too obdurate I,
Choose Thou before that spirit die,
A piercing pain, a killing sin,
And to my dead heart run them in!"
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

THE days pass, we can always be certain of that; we live, we eat our breakfast, and we do our work.

The superficial claims an absolute sway over the history of daily bread, and Arthur Field's private struggle was no exception to the general rule. He was much too awake to the knowledge of things to expect the Heavens to fall, only sometimes as he looked at Rosamonde, she recalled to his mind such old sweet memories, such sad, bright hopes that shone or fell, or vanished as they came; old quarrels and old tears, and the belief so radiant and so true, in joy and love, shaken and darkened now into a faith with clipped wings, and all uncertain of its flight, until the heart-ache grew more dominant than he cared to own, and he rushed into his work with feverish activity. Rosamonde herself was not more happily placed, the new nurse never let her out of her sight, and the servants all looked curiously at her.

She had written an imploring letter to Vera which had received no answer, and Arthur's stern, cold manner, and attempts at conversation on abstract points, frightened and bored her. She liked French novels, and Arthur threw her favourites in the fire; she liked Fuller's sweets, and Arthur limited her to plain chocolate. Finally, one Sunday morning, he met her going to church and asked her where she was going, she mentioned a Roman Church in the neighbourhood.

"Why go to a Roman Church?" he asked her coldly. "I prefer a less excitable service for you, better go to St. George's, Hanover Square." Rosamonde cried like a naughty child, and throwing her book of devotions on the floor, ran out of the room. It ended in her going nowhere, and being very rude to the nurse.

The next morning she received a beautifully gilt-edged card of invitation to Lady Middleton's ball.

"I suppose you won't let me go?" she said. "I believe you wish to send me mad, so that you can shut me up in a lunatic asylum." Arthur Field studied the card very carefully, he was weighing many things in his mind. He had not expected a social opening; was it an opportunity, or would it prove a temptation? He looked across the table at Rosamonde's flushed, anxious face. Disappointment was, he knew, quite the worst thing for her. He pushed his chair back impatiently from the table.

"Let us go by all means," he said. "Have a first-rate dressmaker fit you out, and send the bill in to me." Rosamonde became suddenly as happy as a girl. The nurse was sent for, and Arthur left her in a whirl of delightful indecisions. He became conscious, as he drove off to the hospital, that if all went well at the ball, in front of him stretched the dreary lane of a mock, social existence. For a man entirely overworked, and passionately attached to one of the deeper problems, this prospect was an inquisition. He wondered a little at the purpose that was in him to sacrifice himself and his life work to the flighty commonplace little creature he had married. It would have been so easy to have let her sink, and no one could have blamed him. He made excuses and reasons for himself, he said that it was all because he hated to be beaten, but he was quite aware that it was something a great deal larger than that. He had let the infinite into his life, through every conquered instinct, and severe self-government, he had given room even against his judgment to Unseen Powers, and the result was that within him was something stronger than himself, making for sacrifice. He would have told you, that if you give human nature rope enough, it will use it for one purpose—destruction, yet the rope life had given him he threw out over its waters to preserve—what?—why, simply

Rosamonde, a butterfly submerged. He saw himself with a grim smile facing the Immortals with Andrea Del Sarto's great excuse:

> "So still they overcome
> Because there's still Lucrezia, as I choose."

The hansom stopped with a plunge and a jerk at the familiar gate, the tall, brisk figure shot out across the square into the theatre. One by one the patients were brought in on stretchers, only the worst and most important cases, for it was his afternoon. Afterwards he went back into one of the wards with the Sister, there was a girl he always went to see if he had an extra moment, she had been operated upon, but her case was quite hopeless. She knew it, and he had never seen a pluckier soul. He looked down at her with kind, grave eyes.

"Bad night?" he questioned. The girl smiled.

"A fight, doctor," she said, "but I came out top." A queer impulse seized him, he bent over her.

"I'm fighting, too," he said, "but I don't know how I shall come out."

"I feel sure, sir," she said, looking full into his eyes, "that you'll come out all right."

"How do you know?" he asked her.

"Because God won't let go," said the girl. Arthur Field left her abruptly—with a curt good-day to the Sister. He never saw her again, for her fight ended in the final freedom only a few days after, but all that day his sub-conscious voice repeated the girl's message, "God won't let go." And when a week afterwards Rosamonde knocked at his door to show him her ball-dress, the words forced a smile that was almost kindly to his lips.

"You look very fine, my dear girl," he said to her quietly. She was flushed with the triumph of her appearance.

"Vera never was really pretty," she said. "Do you think so?" He gave her his arm to take her down to the carriage.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Women are strongest; but above all things
Truth beareth away the victory."

I. BOOK OF ESDRAS.

EVERYTHING was really going well. Lady Middleton, casting her eyes over the large and spacious rooms, the wide staircase and the cosy nooks, thinking also of the well-prepared little tables, in a not too distant dining-room, felt a thrill of positive elation. When one could depend on one's cook and trust one's florist, life became simple.

She turned to mingle among her guests, when Mr. and Mrs. Field were announced; and she stood confronted by a dream. Rosamonde was facing her, dressed in pale sea-green with masses of white chiffon, three perfect roses on her shoulder, her fair, fluffy hair framing her appealing blue eyes. For a moment Vera's one fixed idea, was of a primitive order; she longed to tear the white chiffon on her younger sister's dress. The thin smile that crept in a tight band across her lips witnessed to the march of civilization.

"My dear Rosamonde," she murmured, "how well you're looking." Sir Henry Middleton came forward.

"Introduce me to your sister, Vera," he said, and Rosamonde, taking his arm, went the round of the room. Arthur Field lingered by his hostess.

"It was kind of you to ask her," he said in a grave undertone. Vera lifted her eyebrows; she could tell by his voice that after all, they had received an invitation.

"I wanted to do all I could," she murmured; "it's so brave of you."

She had no intention of punishing the wrong person when she could punish the right, but if Daphne *was* the right person—then Daphne's punishment lay in her hand. Arthur Field frowned, and left her. Looking over the brilliant scene before him, he soon discovered Daphne; she was dancing, of course, and as he watched her, he felt within him the glow of his old pride in her. She danced so beautifully, her dress of palest yellow made him think of young spring flowers, and their gracefulness. She was dancing with Reggie Cheston; he watched them as the waltz closed stroll towards the dimly-lighted conservatory. Then, with a rigid effort, he turned back to the thought of Rosamonde.

"I don't think I am going to stay on at the hospital," Daphne said to Reggie. "I wish you cared more for the Church, Reggie," she added, "it's such a help."

"It must be," said Reggie; "does he preach very well?" Daphne's eyes flashed, then she laughed a little under her breath.

"He is a tremendously good man, Reggie," she said, "and you don't know what I've been feeling lately. It would be such a relief to know that I was doing something really helpful."

"It is a little difficult to catch what you mean," said Reggie; "but if you feel that marriage with a clergyman is a kind of spiritual vocation, I should advise you to be careful; the bonds are for life, and you are not my ideal of a parson's wife; besides, you must remember he has a vocation too."

"Oh, of course he cares for me," pursued Daphne; "we have a great deal in common." She sat down gracefully beneath a huge fern. Reggie stood beside her with a peculiarly dogged expression on his face.

"Do you think you are quite fair?" he asked her.

"What do you mean?" said Daphne in real surprise; "I can assure you, Reggie, I am not playing with him. If I say yes I will stick to it. I feel that I ought to explain. I have lived such a worldly, artificial life. No wonder you think that, in spite of my hospital experience, I am only fitted for a ball-dress and an evening party! But, indeed, I am learning many things! Philip Mitchell's position is not an easy one, but his work is the noblest in the world, an attempt to let sunshine into dark lives! Think what it means. Oh! if I could tell you how the faces of the poor haunt me! How the call of their miseries comes up to me, you would understand! And then, Reggie—I have never forgotten David! He loved me and suffered because he loved. I can see this man is beginning to care for me, and I feel that it is partly *because* of David that I could make him happy. I have no right to ruin two lives! After all, what does it matter whether I am happy or not?"

"It does not matter at all whether you are happy or not," said Reggie, sitting down quietly by her side. "But that is not the question you know, the question is whether it's right?" It did not please Daphne that he should be as willing to sacrifice her happiness as she was herself, but she could not admit this.

"Yes," she said, "that is what I feel."

"May I tell you what I think?"

"Of course," said Daphne surprised.

"Let us begin from the beginning," said Reggie in a measured voice, looking straight in front of him at a pink geranium. "You were unhappy with Vera, so you shipped her—for your uncle?"

"It was against—— I couldn't possibly stay here after my father's death," said Daphne.

"Exactly," Reggie continued. "So you went to your uncle's and found it rather dull there. Then you thought it would be easier to marry David."

"I had especial reasons for that!" Daphne pleaded.

"Especial reasons then," said Reggie, "pointed to

David. I may add, in passing, that you didn't care for him, and that he was giving you all he had, and you were giving him nothing at all except 'especial reasons'—a little thin that for a marriage settlement!"

"Reggie!"

"Let me go on," pursued the young man gravely. "After your little cousin's death, you threw over your uncle and aunt, and went to the hospital with your friend. Circumstances arose showing you an objectionable weakness in David, so you threw over David. Now you talk of giving up your friend, and the hospital, in order to go and work in the slums. Marriage again, you notice, with a man you don't care for, because you are haunted by the faces of the poor. Are you quite sure that you are fitted for the work? Or that it is sufficient to offer a man in return for the best that is in him, a friendly interest in his parish? Do you know what anything *real* means?" Daphne was breathless with anger; she could not get up and go away, and for a moment she could think of no suitable reply.

Reggie had taken her so absolutely by surprise. She had always considered him an admiring friend, a little weak perhaps, but in a good-natured, boyish way, and very fond of her. Of course, very fond of her—most of her friends were that. Imperceptibly she had all her life leaned on what her friends thought of her. The likeness was too flattering to be true, but it was impossible to look with comfort upon a likeness too true to be flattering, and it was this that Reggie held up inexorably before her. But her motives were so good. Taken one by one, her every action had been so kindly, unselfish, so high-principled! This picture of Reggie's looked as if he held in his hand a list of posings, the posings of a heartless egoist!

"Do you know what anything real means?" he repeated, with his eyes upon that terrible pink geranium. She was looking at it now, it appeared so very artificial.

"I—Reggie, do you really think I am like that?" she gasped. She was too ashamed to look at him, so she did not see his lips twitch, nor the new, kind light in his eyes.

"I think you have thought that you were a princess in a fairy-tale, Daphne, and that it was merely a question of flowers, and favours, and magic words, and it isn't a fairy-tale. Men aren't like that. Most girls are brought up in the fairy-tale fashion, and it's awfully hard on us; you play with fire, and you won't have anything more to do with us if you see sparks. You are always throwing gloves into an arena of lions, because you don't quite understand lions! I don't like talking to you in this way, but when I hear you speak of marrying a man who loves you—in order to help the poor, you are putting the wrong things together. Love earns one thing and that only—love

—you can't give anything else instead. Esteem, affection, help, by all means give them in exchange for—esteem, affection—help, but don't try to barter the respectables, in exchange for love. It's an attempt to stop the tide with sand-castles. Sell yourself if you like, but be frank about it, and don't call it by grand names. Flirtation is a repulsive system of theft; you take all you can get, real things mind you, not names, and you give worthless trash back, for your part of the bargain. Be shocked at drink and play, and then intoxicate with your eyes, and gamble with your complexion—and say that 'The poor boy behaved very badly'; I used to think better things of you, Daphne!"

"Oh! for Heaven's sake, stop!" cried Daphne; "do you think I am a flirt?"

"Yes," said Reggie, "I do."

"Then take me back at once to Vera!" cried Daphne. "Oh! how *dare* you say such things to me? Reggie—how can you?" Reggie looked miserably at the pink geranium. He was asking himself the same question. He had never talked so much in his life before, but he could bear no longer, the ache in his heart, and what gave fire and force to his condemnation, made it more than impossible to explain.

"I am sorry," he said at last, "I knew you wouldn't like it."

"Like it?" flashed Daphne. Then she rose to her feet. "You have behaved intolerably," she said, "good-bye." And she swept past him alone, into the glitter of the great ball-room. Reggie picked the geranium and put it in his button-hole.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"But what if I fail in my purposes here?
It is but to keep the nerves at a strain
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled get up and begin again,
So the chase takes up one's life, that's all."
ROBERT BROWNING.

DAPHNE felt almost a passion of relief as she caught sight of her face in a mirror. The world had just turned upside down, but, thank God, she was still beautiful! She stood in the babble of the gilded room, and watched the swarm of well-dressed men and women around her. She had, at that moment, a strange, psychological experience; even as she watched them, the noise of the room ceased, and instead of the figures and colours of the brilliant gathering, she saw the long stretch of the ward at night. The faces in shadow of the sick, pain-stricken men, some of them sleeping restlessly, and some with wide eyes watching the hours as they passed. She seemed to feel the heat of the long night, and to see again at dawn the bustle of returning life and day.

She was on night duty at present which explained her presence at the ball. Once a month the night nurses had a day and a night off which they generally spent in sleep, but to Daphne the old life formed a greater recreation.

The tiny jewelled watch she wore told her it was three o'clock, so many of them die at three o'clock! The band was playing one of those half-divine, and passionately human waltzes that seem to strike on all the chords of love and pain. Daphne drew a deep breath and the vision of the ward faded. When she looked before her again, something seemed to have past away from the glow and beauty of the brilliant scene. The women appeared a little tawdry, and the flowers drooped, under the flare of the electric light.

"Do you know what anything real means?" Daphne asked herself. Vera came up to her on the arm of a fine, soldierly-looking man, whom she introduced to her as Colonel Dalgeny. He began at once to speak to her about Katherine; he took her down to supper, and she found that she liked him very much.

"My wife wants to talk to you," he said; "but you look very tired, will you wait here till I bring her to you?" He placed her in a curtained alcove by an open window, a portière marked it off from the rest of the hall. Daphne assented thankfully, and leaning back closed her eyes and waited.

"David," said a voice close to her, "do you know you have not spoken to me for a hundred years?"

"I haven't wanted to, Lady Cheston."

"Ah, poor boy—poor boy," said Lady Cheston. "Have you felt so badly about it as that?" There was a silence and Daphne felt subtilely conscious that David could be made not to mean what he had said. She could not see them, but she almost felt the summoning power of Lady Cheston's large grey eyes. Reggie's eyes were like them, only they did not say the same things.

"But she did quite right, you know," Lady Cheston went on; "she never in the least understood you, and you behaved very badly, my poor boy."

"Well—she didn't care for me," said David miserably.

"No, she didn't care for you," repeated Lady Cheston.

"No one does," he muttered sulkily. "I might as well go to the devil." There was a long, breathless pause, a pause in which the blood runs riot, and pulses tell tales. That something passed between the two, Daphne felt sure, she thought that Lady Cheston had put out her hand.

"Oh, no! no! David, that's not true!" she said at last, "somebody cares." Daphne rose to her feet and, with a quick movement, gained the hall. Behind her she heard a startled exclamation, and a low laugh.

The angry colour rushed into her face, the Colonel returned opportunely with Mrs. Dalgeny on his arm.

"My dear child," she said, softly catching hold of Daphne's hands, "tell me about my girl?"

Daphne could hardly believe it was Mrs. Linton who stood before her, she was dressed so beautifully, and she looked so happy. Then, looking at the Colonel, she understood, the tragedy was still there, but now it was in his face. She withdrew her hands from Mrs. Linton and told her briefly about Katherine. "She signed on yesterday for two years, and I go up to-morrow," she said.

"Are you going to sign on?" the Colonel asked her. Daphne hesitated.

"No," she said, "I am not."

"Perhaps Miss Fordington is going to sign a different *kind* of contract?" suggested Mrs. Dalgeny in her cooing voice. Daphne threw back her head.

"I am not going to be married, if that is what you mean," she said shortly. Mrs. Dalgeny smiled sweetly.

"That is what young girls always say until they are asked," said Mrs. Dalgeny; she was not very fond of Daphne.

"Or until they have answered," said the girl with ready assurance. They parted still smiling, and the Colonel suppressed a chuckle.

It was four o'clock and Daphne stood at a little table in the supper-room drinking lemonade. Looking up, she met Arthur Field's eyes, he was standing at the opposite side of the room. She turned to the man who was with her, and asked him to fetch her an ice, then she looked back at Arthur Field. A moment later he reached her side, and for awhile they were silent.

"Which is your wife?" Daphne asked finally, glancing over the little supper-tables.

"She is with Sir Henry Middleton," said Arthur. Daphne's eyes found her.

"I did not know she was so pretty," she murmured, and Arthur fancied her lips quivered. He wanted immensely to know how much she minded, and if she thought he had done right.

Then he saw that by Rosamonde's side was a glass of champagne. She was talking and smiling to her companion, but her hand went out towards the glass. Arthur crossed the room, and stood by them.

"Is this your handkerchief, Rosamonde?" he asked, holding out a dainty lace trifle in his hand. Rosamonde looked up startled, and Arthur Field stupidly overturned her glass. He apologized profusely and went to fetch her another, he brought it back more carefully this time. It was filled with lemonade. When he looked back at Daphne her partner had rejoined her. "I think it is time for us to go, Rosamonde," he said to his wife.

"Where did you find the handkerchief, Arthur?" Rosamonde asked angrily as they drove back.

"In your room," said her husband; "I brought it with me in case you might want another one." Rosamonde bit her lips, and they drove home in silence.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"God's justice, tardy though it prove,
Rests never on the track
Until it reach delinquency."
ROBERT BROWNING.

WHEN Daphne went up to her room a thin, grey light was growing out of the east. From her window the houses stood out in heavy, mysterious shapes against the sky, the street lamps flared dimly, and far off in the city the great tide of labour, gave morning witness, to its intention of flooding the town. Daphne shivered and turned on the electric light; she never could think much in the dark, and she wanted to think more than anything in the world. In a few hours time she would have to answer at the Board of Trustees as to whether she would sign on or not, and she was not going to. Katherine would be hurt, and she would have to say good-bye, then she would go to her uncle and tell him that she meant to stay.

She would grow old there doing good in the parish; it would be very dull, doing good seemed to be that, she thought; but then, wasn't even doing bad, dull, when you had to keep it up? In time her hair would turn grey, and she would begin to call people "My dear"; her aunt always called people "My dear." Then Reggie would see that she was not a flirt, but of course it didn't matter in the least what Reggie saw, he had behaved abominably, she would never speak to him again. Arthur would be surprised, but his wife was very pretty, perhaps he would not be surprised long. As for Philip, he had never really spoken, she would write him a very nice little letter, and he would probably keep it, but he would stick to his parish. All these thoughts passed like pictures through her mind, and left her staring blankly before her, and repeating word for word what Reggie had said.

Then she took up a pen and wrote to her uncle. "I want to come back to you," she wrote, "and live differently. I have taken an absolute pleasure in getting my own way, and then have been proud of myself for getting it. There is not a single thing in my life at this present moment, which is not a self-indulgence or the result of one. Life has brought me up sharp very often, and I have given up the accursed thing, but I have found other ones just as much accursed. I have done good things from bad motives, and when I have had good motives, I have generally not done the things! I have been independent and it has not succeeded, I have made my own discipline, and been careful that there shouldn't be thorns.

"Now I wish to put my life in your hands. I want to wake up and be forgiven, and punished, and to begin again. Do you remember reading me one night Rossetti's 'Landmark?'

> "Yet though no light be left nor bird now sing
> As here I turn, I'll thank God, hastening,
> That the same goal is still on the same track."

Let me return then, and show me what I must do. I must tell you, I have not played the game fair. I have made some people very unhappy because I have wanted to be liked, and I *still* want to be liked, only not by making people unhappy. That is a very terrible way, and I hope it will hurt me horribly whenever I think about it. May I come? Daphne."

Then she wrote a short note three times and tore it up; the fourth time she let it stand.

"Dear Reggie," she had written. "All that you said to-night was perfectly true, and a great deal more that you might have said and didn't, that was true as well, and indeed, I am grateful to you, though I was very angry at the time. I am going back to my uncle, and I do not expect I shall ever see you again. But you will know that I think of you most gratefully and wish you all good luck. Daphne Fordington."

"And I won't write to Philip at all," she said, and that was very hard, for she knew she could have written such a nice letter to Philip. Then she undressed and went to bed. It was seven o'clock, and London was wide awake now.

In Lady Middleton's dressing-room London was very wide awake indeed. She stood facing her husband, and he, with his hand on the door, was obliged to stay.

"So *you* sent that invitation," she said at last in piercingly chilly tones. "Who made you?"

"I don't see why," said her husband a little sulkily, "you think I had to be *made* to—it was only right."

"Oh, right!" said Vera, with infinite scorn. "I should have thought you would have had more sense than to make that excuse to me." She repeated the question. Sir Henry told her, and then wished he hadn't; both of these things were a habit with him. "Do you know that she is a very bad woman?" his wife asked coldly.

"I know that she drinks," he blurted out. Lady Middleton sat down, she was very tired, and she had not counted on his knowledge of facts.

"Why do you wish to disgrace us?" she asked. "People will want to know why Arthur Field lived alone, and where she was. The thing will get out. I shall never be able to hold up my head again. Daphne and David were bad enough, but this——" She paused speechless.

"She's your own sister," he threw out feebly.

"Oh, go to bed!" snapped his wife, "you were born a fool! At any rate in the future leave things to me and don't meddle."

Sir Henry Middleton backed out of the door, he was very thankful indeed that there was a door. Vera sat there for a long time, she looked grey and old. By-and-bye a maid brought her tea. When she left her, Vera leaned back in the chair and cried. She was very tired, and it was all so unfortunate, and there were no societies, for that sort of thing.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

> "The glad, sad, tranquil, passionate human heart."
>
> WILLIAM WATSON.

OF course Katherine was startled and at first almost angry at her friend's decision. It is so difficult not to be angry when one is startled, but it was her custom always to take the common-sense version.

The work was telling on Daphne, Overham had always suited her, and it was very, very much better for Philip. Daphne had been making things very hard for Philip. Katherine had spoken to her quite frankly about it. "I do not care for Philip," she said, "as I thought I did, but I do not like to watch him being played with, I like him a great deal too much for that." And Daphne had said, that she wasn't playing with him, and that she thought Katherine was very unkind, and that she was going to evensong. But even though Katherine took all these things into consideration, her heart ached at the thought of her own loneliness. She would be quite cut off from the rest of the world, only a part of a great machine, and to be a part of a great machine is very cruel. Then there was Bert Russell.

The hours off which had been started in the quiet little A. B. C. had been carried on by the side of the Thames, and in many city wanderings.

The American knew London better than many who were born and bred in her. He had explored, visited and wandered into all unlikely places. At night he had passed out into the life of the streets, North, South, East and West, and he had seen and heard strange and surprising things. To Katherine he revealed only the fascinating side of them. During their holiday hours he never attempted to make love to her, but he had made himself indispensable. When she looked out into the future, it was he who made that indescribable difference between a blank out-look, and a bracing cheerfulness. She did not consciously count him in, but it had become impossible for her to count him out. Daphne's going would mean that he might become more to her, and Katherine knew this would not do at all, he was quite enough to her already. Daphne herself felt leaving the hospital more than she had thought possible. She was shutting herself out of a world that has a fascination greater than its hardships. It is terrible to give up possibilities, for experience has laid no dark restraining hand upon their hopefulness.

"Oh, Katherine!" said Daphne their last evening, "I do not want to say good-bye." Katherine looked at her steadily.

"You have not told me yet," she said, "why you are going to say it."

"Because," said Daphne, "I should never have come here, I should have stayed with my uncle. It has been a mistake, a beautiful mistake, for I have been very happy here, but that was not right either, now I must go back. Oh, why is one always going back?" Katherine never understood why Daphne should sorrow over abstract things. She felt herself so very unhappy at losing her friend, that she could not argue, nor did she wish to explain.

"I shall—miss you!" she said. So the next morning Daphne disappeared.

If she had expected to find Overham changed, because she had, she was disappointed.

Her aunt was managing a Sunday school treat in the Vicarage field. She kissed Daphne when she came in (after handing the last bun to the last child) and told her how many pounds of cake were left over from the treat. It would keep, she explained, until next week when there was to be a choir tea. Her uncle said very little, she thought he was looking a great deal older, and she was a little disappointed that he entirely overlooked her spiritual trials. She had come there to be made good, and for the first few weeks she expected to see dramatic signs of it, but she found it very difficult to keep her temper with her aunt. By-and-bye the first dismal feeling of unwontedness wore off, there appeared many little things that she could do, she arranged the flowers, did the church vases, and ran errands for her aunt. She had asked her uncle if she might take a district to visit, but he had evaded her request, and she was too proud to ask him again. In the autumn he suggested that she should start an evening club for the village boys, and she jumped at the opening. At first it was very hard, they were extremely shy, red and awkward, and had horribly large hands, but in the course of a few weeks they grew to like the pleasant parish room with its wood fire, and tables covered with games, books and papers, and the sight of "Miss Daphne," who was always smiling and willing, and to whom they gave a surprising deference and affection.

Daphne grew humble, with a keen sense of how little she was doing to deserve so much.

The club grew and she started a Sunday Bible Class in connection with it. Her letters to Katherine grew full of daily difficulties and surprises in her new work. It *was* surprising, and at first very much a system of working in the dark.

"One gets," Daphne wrote, "very disconcerted about what may be going on in their minds, but, by-and-bye, one understands that it is more probably nothing at all, than anything so very terrible. Of course they are quite inarticulate. If there is anything they don't like, they won't tell you, you have to feel it in the air, and then suggest to them all the things it may be until an increase of vacancy in their faces, tells you that you have found the stumbling block, and by the time you have found it, it is quite possible that they may have got so used to it, that they will object to its departure, and you will have to bring it back again. You may get angry sometimes, but you must be good-humoured after it, and you must always be fair. In all these things one finds that it is merely character that tells. What you *are* strikes through all that you say, and if you talk beautifully and it does not come out of your heart, they don't listen. It is tremendously good for one not to be listened to, it makes one so careful what one says."

Days passed into weeks, and then into months, until one day Katherine became a staff-nurse, and Daphne found she had been back in Overham a year.

Routine puts wings to time, and it is really only events that interfere with the flight of it. Overham was now, to Daphne, a large and exciting centre of existence. She had forgotten all about dullness and grey hairs. She had not, however, forgotten all about Arthur, nor had the sting of Reggie's sudden truthfulness passed out of her life; but these things she had buried, and though they sometimes called to her that she had not buried them deep enough, she put it down to the cry of a girl's heart for love and recognition. And after all, the cry and the ache only came to her sometimes, when she was alone in the garden on summer nights, or as she struggled home on autumn evenings when the wind was high, and the spirit of passing things called out upon her youth and loneliness. When she felt these moods she would go and play to her uncle, and he would watch her a little wistfully.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

> "And the way to end dreams is to break them,
> Stand! Walk! Go!"
>
> ROBERT BROWNING.

"AND to-morrow," said Katherine, "my holiday begins."

"Oh! Good! Good!" cried the American. The hot, dry end of another summer found them still in London, in empty London, when the park seats are stacked together, and the sun hot in the sky, shows unrelentingly the deep coating of dust under which the tired world lies, and the people who don't go away grow old before their time.

"Only," said Katherine, looking at the heavy, crawling waters of the Thames, "I don't know where to go! Do you believe," she said, eyeing her companion sternly, "in treating people as they deserve?"

"Good Heavens, no!" cried Bert in dismay. "Besides, how do you know what they deserve?"

"Oh, it is so easy to make allowances for people," said Katherine angrily, "so easy to let things pass, and be tolerant, that is how people behave toward wrong! They look away from it, and call it a 'Pity!' It is not fair on those that do right. It is a premium on sin. I am tired of the doctrine of ease, and a standard of Blindness. If people were half as casual about their incomes as they are about their conduct, they would, most of them, be beggars. But in questions of right and wrong, we take the ostrich attitude and make the world a great, vague place of lost truths and buried treasures. I am sick of cheap excuses for sin!" Bert looked at her in surprise; he had never heard her talk before, and he found it suited her almost as excellently, as her silences and short replies. He had to pull himself together, as he had to do more often than ever of late, when watching her face took the place of listening, to what she said.

"You are trying to think hardly of someone," he said, "but I wouldn't if I were you. You see, we know so little about each other anyway, and temptation is such a very real thing. There is never more than a hair's breadth of difference between right and wrong, and sometimes when one gets lifted off one's feet by an immense emotion, the 'oughts' drop out. Haven't you ever known a time when the 'oughts' dropped out?"

"No," said Katherine; "I have done wrong frequently, but not like that, I have been quite able not to. I believe one can always help it."

"Maybe that's so," said Bert, "and that makes it pretty easy for us if it is so, but it doesn't prove anything about other people. I guess there are times for most of us when one almost *can't* help it. When one sees red or blue as the case may be, and then goes for it. It is all very well for someone who doesn't see it to look shocked, and say one might have gone somewhere else, but they're way off. It's not their funeral. You've lived a very simple life, Miss Linton, and I don't mean by simple an easy one. The easy ones are generally the most complicated, and the hard ones sometimes pretty straight, but wait till you get to the cross roads before you make statements, and when other people take the wrong way, just give 'em a chance to come back. You see, there isn't much virtue in doing right if you haven't with all your heart longed to do wrong—and not done it."

"I could not trust anyone who had committed certain great sins, wilfully," said Katherine.

"Well! it wouldn't be sin, you know, if it wasn't wilful," said Bert, smiling; "besides, what do you mean by great, and what do you mean by trust?"

"Oh, you do quibble," exclaimed the girl impatiently.

"Why, no!" said Bert; "words have such loose meanings, I wanted to be quite sure. You see what you might call a great sin someone else might think a poor kind of a mistake, and trust——! Well 'trust' means any amount of things. There are men one could trust with one's money, but not with a little tale, and there are some one could trust with all one's little tales, but not with half-a-crown."

"I couldn't trust anyone at all unless I could trust them entirely," said Katherine.

"Well, I wouldn't do that if I were you," said Bert gently, "because human nature is sure to give way somewhere. Better wait for the Angels."

Katherine had received a letter from her mother asking her to come and spend her holiday with them, at a lovely little place on the Thames. Her father warmly seconded her mother's invitation. Katherine looked doubtfully at her companion.

"There seems very little to be said for the people who do right from your point of view," she said shortly.

"They don't need anything to be said for them," Bert replied, smiling. "They can get along without."

"I shall probably spend the next fortnight with my mother," said Katherine.

"All the time with your mother?" Bert pleaded, holding out his hand.

"What's that for?" Katherine asked, scornfully.

"The address," said Bert, "I want to see—your mother." Katherine gave it to him.

"Come on Sunday, then, if you like," she said, a little ungraciously. "It will make no difference."

"Well, I wouldn't be too sure," said Bert as she turned to leave him, "it all depends on what you mean by difference."

Bert walked to the edge of the embankment and gazed out over Westminster. It was a view that he loved, but meant to leave. Deep down in his heart the call of the hurrying, shouting continent, he called his home, could be heard very plainly—and of late very frequently.

As he looked at the stately grey towers, and the slow, small river before him, his eyes saw more clearly still the great sweep of New York harbour, and the huge, incongruous, marvellous city rose up out of its water home, to beckon to him. There were many tyrants in his city of liberty, but there was the clear, dry air, the friendly sun, and myriads of his brothers, a hustling, inconsequential, kindly horde. All going as fast as they could, with humorous knowledge of their own speed, towards uncertain gigantic goals of their own imagining.

He had lived two years in England, and he had learnt how to hide crude longings, and big dreams, and just how long afternoon-tea took, and how to show a dignified friendliness with footmen, and a self-respecting reverence to little personages. But he was getting tired of it, sick and weary of the neat little days, and the carefully drawn little lines. "The twice-breathed air blew damp." There was only one thing, one motive, which had kept him there so long. The steady-eyed, rather inarticulate girl who had just left him. Then he began to realize just how he wanted her to see America. They would go and stay with his brother for awhile, and then look around for a little house somewhere quiet near New York. Maybe they would come back to visit England. He turned back resolute and inspired. "I guess," he said, with a wave of militant Americanism getting the better of his newly-acquired English manner, "I guess little old New York is good enough for me!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"So when the Angel of the darker Drink,
At last shall find you by the river brink,
And, offering his cup, invite your soul
Forth to your lips to quaff—you shall not shrink!"

RUBIAYAT.

ARTHUR FIELD rang an electric bell, and as his wife's nurse entered the room, he swung round on his chair, and looked at her. "You may sit down," he said.

The nurse was a quiet, sensible-looking woman of thirty, but she was a woman with one enthusiasm, and that was devoted to her profession in the abstract, and to the surgeon in particular.

"I never trust nurses," he announced, "they are usually either professionally or socially incompetent for their positions, and in the rare cases, where they neither neglect nor interfere with their patients, they make difficulties with servants or quarrel with relations. However, there are exceptions to every rule, and it would suit me very well if you were to turn out one of the exceptions.

"I, therefore, propose to put you in a position of trust, though I shall of course keep my eye on you." He paused. "I meant to leave town to-morrow with my wife, but a case has arrived which I must attend to myself, so that I shall send you and Mrs. Field on ahead. It is possible I may be detained in town for some weeks longer. I should prefer that you did not wear uniform, but accompany Mrs. Field unofficially, and as her friend. I wish a weekly report from you, and if any undesirable symptoms should arise, you may wire. If I should send for my wife, you would of course bring her here directly. That is all. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, but I wish we need not leave you," said the nurse, with unaccustomed boldness.

"Why?" asked her companion.

"You have not looked yourself lately, sir." The surgeon stared a little, but took no further notice of her remark.

"Here is a cheque for a hundred pounds," he said; "you are to keep an account of your expenditure and let me know if you need more." He turned back to his desk again. The nurse hesitated.

"Good-bye, sir," she said at last.

"What?" asked the surgeon over his shoulder. "Ah—good-bye."

The nurse turned away quickly. She did not wish him to see that her eyes were full of tears. When he had seen them off, he gave a sigh of relief and drove to the hospital. He did not feel himself at all, and the case he intended to devote his time to, was his own. He began to feel the need of a consultant.

An hour later, bending in absolute absorption over the operating-table, an intense spasm of pain seized him, making furrows in his face, and bringing out strange blue lines about his mouth. He felt furiously angry, and forced himself with the whole power of his will, to carry out his task. The assistant, handing him a sponge, gasped ; he had distinctly seen the great operator's hand tremble. Arthur Field felt that intolerable struggle of will and flesh, which comes fortunately to few of us, and only to the strongest. The perspiration stood in heavy drops on his forehead. He seemed swimming through bewildering seas of faintness and pain ; through it all, he saw the sharp instruments succeeding each other in the hands, of what seemed to him another man, a man provokingly, cruelly slow. He felt his legs shake under him, and the great theatre rose and sank in queer, slanting lines, above and around him. A voice was crying in his brain, "Let go! let go! let go!" He was submerged in a storm of pain at the mercy of an element he did not understand, an element which claimed an absolute surrender. The important thing was to keep the other fellow's hands steady. It took several years to put in the last stitch ; at the end of the time the other fellow fell down on the floor, and someone poured brandy between his teeth, but the operation was finished, and he knew it would be successful. A group of students carried the other fellow out, and put him in a cab. Strangely enough one of them came with him, and took him to the surgeon's own house. Then Arthur Field came to himself, and knew that he had performed his last operation.

"Wouldn't you like to see someone, sir?" the young man asked him deferentially. "The big men aren't all out of town yet; there are——and——"

"Yes, I mean to see Sir Edmund Blake this afternoon," said Arthur Field. (He felt it was bitterly unfair that, after one had surrendered, the enemy should go on fighting.) "I am obliged to you," he added. (If the young man would only go, one might breathe without the world pressing on one's chest; it is impossible for two people to breathe comfortably in one room.)

"May I send you one of our nurses, sir?" the young man questioned him. Arthur bowed suddenly to the necessity.

"Get me one of the hospital staff, if you can," he agreed, "one who will know how to hold her tongue. This is not—my first attack." The student put on an expression of forced cheerfulness, (it was this more than anything else that revealed to the surgeon that he had joined the ranks—he was a patient now, and they would all try to deceive him.)

"You need a short rest," the young man observed, reassuringly.

"I am going to take one," said the surgeon, a little grimly. "Good-afternoon." Then he sent in his resignation to the hospital.

Katherine, within a few hours of her expected holiday, was sent for to the Matron's room. The Matron gave her a quick, searching glance.

"I cannot spare you to-morrow," she said, "I have a very responsible and important case to put into your hands. You have shown yourself to be reliable. I hope you will continue to be so. You will kindly report yourself at Mr. Field's as soon as you can put your things together."

"Am I to nurse for him please, Matron?" Katherine asked wonderingly.

"You are to nurse—him," said the Matron. "You will not, however," she added, "mention this at present. Good-afternoon."

Katherine hesitated and then went. After all, why should she not nurse him? She could find no answer, and she dared ask no more questions. Curiosity is a weakness that hospital life is quick to eradicate.

When she reached the surgeon's, she found him in his room on the sofa. A few hours had changed him into a wreck of his former self, he seemed like someone suddenly grown old. The lines in his face had deepened into furrows, and his deep set eyes gleamed from veritable caverns. They seemed, indeed, the only signs of his old, keen life about him, as he lay huddled, struggling with short, uncertain breath, upon his sofa.

He knew her in a moment, but he gave no sign of recognition. His blue lips murmured an expostulation when she told him they must get him to bed.

It was evident to Katherine that he meant to die as hard as he had lived. She had seen the great heart specialist before she went into her patient. He had been (for him) very much upset.

"He has been fighting it for two years," he told her, "though the mischief must have been latent for a much longer time. If he had had proper treatment and perfect rest—but it's too late now. And he knew it—he knew it the whole time!" Sir Edmund Blake had grown almost incoherent in his admiration and grief. "It is unjustifiable, perfectly unjustifiable—but it's magnificent," he had exclaimed to himself. Katherine questioned as to the future, and the doctor froze into a realization that he had been talking more freely than he liked—to a nurse. "He may get over this attack," he said, "but even he cannot get over the next."

"And he may have another?" Katherine ventured.

"Any sudden shock—or strain," said the doctor; "but you had better go to him, nurse," and Katherine went. She began to feel glad that she had come.

Katherine would have been terrified of nursing him had he not been so ill, as to make action, work off all her fears. Yet even when he was at his worst, he was sternly, implacably critical.

Once or twice he made her valuable suggestions, which she was quick to carry out. Then he smiled, and she was able to understand about Daphne. A few days later the worst of his attack was over, he had insisted upon remaining alive, and his fight had been apparently successful. He lay in comparative comfort, watching Katherine as she quickly tidied his room, giving the finishing touches to some flowers sent to her from Devonshire.

"Nurse!" said the patient, sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Where did those flowers come from?" Katherine hesitated.

"From Daphne," she said finally. Then she waited, trembling, for the storm. The surgeon said nothing. Half-an-hour later he called to her again.

"I am getting over this," he said. "Of course I may have another—that is why Sir Edmund Blake wishes you to stay on, but I do not. I wish you to take a holiday. I shall join my wife to-morrow."

"You are not fit to travel, sir," said Katherine; "please keep me a week longer. I can wait quite well for my holiday. I should so much prefer——"

"I am not questioning your preferences," said the surgeon, "I am merely stating my intentions. I should be glad if you would travel with me to-morrow, to the place in Surrey where my wife is staying.

Now go!" A spasm of pain shot across his face, and Katherine, knowing what it meant, left him unwillingly.

After she had gone, he re-read a telegram he had received. "Unfavourable symptoms have arisen.—Smith." He got up and crawled across his room. It took him half-an-hour to reach a cupboard in the wall where his things stood, and he fainted four times. When he reached it, he poured out a tremendous dose, which he would have considered murder, to have given to another patient. Its effect was marvellous, and he reached the sofa again in comparative comfort. Later in the day he sat up, and the next morning Katherine, with a sinking heart, made all preparations for their journey.

It had passed much more easily than she had imagined. The surgeon looked almost his former self again; his power of recuperation was wonderful. Once or twice he took something from a bottle when her back was turned. For the first time since she had been with him, he talked to her charmingly.

Rosamonde and her friend, Miss Smith, had taken a lovely house in the Surrey Hills, where many of their London friends had joined them. Rosamonde was absolutely happy. Had she not at last all the appearances, the semblances, the artificialities which she had always hankered after? She was treated with deference and admiration, she had her own way, and her husband was in London. Once or twice lately she had felt a wave of her old trouble. The sparkling wine, the gaiety and irresponsibility of her guests, had pushed her to the brink of a temptation, but her friend, Miss Smith, kept the key of the cellars, and watched her glass at dinner-time. By-and-bye Rosamonde ceased to be on the watch, and became instead quite convinced that she had won the day. Nothing disagreeable (she felt quite sure) would ever happen again—she told Miss Smith so. Rosamonde showed herself horribly shocked at the tale of a great lady's slip in an alcoholic circle.

"I really can't understand people doing such things," she affirmed. "Drink is so despicable—and for a woman——" Miss Smith smiled, and sent the telegram.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

> “For I say this is death, and the sole death—
> When a man’s loss comes to him from his gain,
> Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
> And lack of love from love made manifest.”
>
> ROBERT BROWNING.

LADY CHESTON, Reggie and the twins were numbered among Rosamonde’s guests.

Vera had taken a house not far from them, and Rosamonde had invited her to lunch. It was very hot, and in spite of deck-chairs in the shade, iced drinks and muslin frocks, life was somewhat of a burden.

Rosamonde stopped the gardener from rolling the lawn; she said it made her uncomfortable to see hot people, and that she didn’t see why they should work in the summer.

“What about the cook?” Lady Cheston suggested. “It’s always disgustingly hot in the kitchen.” Rosamonde frowned.

“One doesn’t see one’s cook,” she said, “so of course it doesn’t matter.” Miss Smith was in the house, and Rosamonde had some iced champagne. It was terrible not to be able to take as much as she wanted, and she began to want it a great deal. She looked anxiously towards the house, then she gathered up two bottles and said she must take them in to poor little Mrs. Ellis, who had a shocking headache; did Lady Cheston know that champagne was awfully good for headaches?

Lady Cheston had barely time to scream after her, that she knew it was good for *givin'* headaches, before she reached the house. She went swiftly upstairs to her room and locked the door.

An hour later Miss Smith heard the sound of a fall in Rosamonde's room; she hurried upstairs to find the door locked, but she was a woman of resources, and kept a duplicate key. When she went into the room, she saw—what she expected to see, and put It to bed.

It was nearly time to meet Mr. Field's train. No one but herself knew of his arrival. So she locked the door after her, leaving a message with the servants that Mrs. Field had a headache and must on no account be disturbed. Then she met the train.

When Arthur saw her face on the platform, a queer smile came to his lips. "Nurse," he said, turning to Katherine, "I may need you another week after all. Do you mind?"

"No, sir, I meant to stay if you would let me," Katherine answered.

Miss Smith was shocked at the sight of him, and she hated Katherine, but she made haste to call a cab. "I didn't know you had been ill, sir," she explained, "or I would have brought a carriage. It is only a short walk from here, perhaps the nurse——" she left the sentence unfinished.

"Yes, you may walk, nurse," said Mr. Field. When they were alone in the cab, Miss Smith told him her little story. He listened to it calmly.

"The duplicate key," he remarked, when she had finished, "was a distinct gain."

"I fear you may think me careless, sir——" the nurse broke out, with tears in her eyes.

"Then, I should have said so," Arthur replied. Miss Smith was silent. "By-the-bye," Arthur said carelessly, "my wife's friends do not usually address me as 'Sir.'" As they reached the drive, Arthur looked at his watch. "She must be down to dinner; how many hours have we got?" he asked.

"Four, sir—Mr. Field, I mean!"

"I will rest for two hours," said Arthur, "then I will come to her." Miss Smith gazed at him.

"Do you—do you require another nurse, sir?" she asked pleadingly, "I could look after you." The surgeon shot a quick glance at her.

"My wife's friends do not nurse me as a rule," he said, with a smile, "I think it would scarcely do. Besides, you have your hands full already." Miss Smith's face clouded, she did not like what was in her hands. Then she remembered that she did the housekeeping. At any rate she could give Katherine an uncomfortable room.

Houses, like people, seem to have their hours of tension. In certain rooms there is a secret emotion of disaster, which communicates itself to the very furniture, till, on entering, one might accuse them of being haunted by anticipation. The garden under the Surrey Hills seemed a victim to a kindred feeling. The slow, drowsy hours between tea and dinner had about them an under-current of suspense; even Lady Cheston assured her companion on the lawn that it was an uncomfortable afternoon. Her friend suggested thunder, and they watched a cloud-bank rise up over the hills and prophesied a storm. At six o'clock the surgeon went to his wife's room, he found Miss Smith with her. Rosamonde was awake but still stupid; she gazed at him in sulky discomfort until Miss Smith left them alone.

"Now Rosamonde," he said, "you are quite sensible enough to know that you must come down to dinner to-night. But before then we must try to make you sensible enough to do it. Have I got your attention?" There was something in his eyes and voice, a repressed emotion that was so deeply guarded, and had about it such an immense restraint, that even his wife was partially aroused by it. She began to cry weakly; and he waited with his eyes fixed on her.

Then she became too frightened even to cry. " Yes, I hear you," she muttered.

" I spoke to you of punishment," he said, " but we will postpone that until to-morrow. Rosamonde, look at me! " The words shot out with so sudden a force, that she started up abruptly, only to sink back again in her seat with her eyes drawn to his, in ineffectual combat. He rose slowly, and painfully, and walked across to her. " Shut your eyes," he said. She shut them. With the tips of his fingers on her forehead, and his head bent a little towards her face, he began to speak. " You will get up in half-an-hour," he said, " your natural self. You will be a little tired, a little stupid, that is unavoidable, but you will be sober, quite sober. Do you hear? "

" Quite sober," said Rosamonde instantly.

" You will be able to walk straight, and to talk distinctly, quite distinctly. Do you understand? " There was a moment's pause. The word was a difficult one, but it came at last.

" I shall be able to talk—quite distinctly," she said with perceptible effort.

" Say that again," said the surgeon. She repeated it with less effort. " Now walk across the room steadily," he said, and stepped aside. She stood up, and with her eyes still shut, walked erect, and gracefully to the window. Then she stopped and reeled as if she would fall. He kept his eyes on her without moving. " Now come back and sit down," he said. Rosamonde obeyed. He gave what might have been a sigh of relief, and sat down near her.

Whom, after all, do men marry behind the pretty masks they are drawn to? One leaps a gulf with an enigma, and never can recross, but in time one reads the enigma. Arthur had read her very soon indeed, but it had made no difference; bit by bit she had destroyed his life.

"You may open your eyes now," he said at last. She looked at him angrily.

"I don't know what you are doing *here?*" she said, as if he had only just entered the room.

"I appear to be sitting in amicable conversation with my wife," said the surgeon in sudden bitterness. He wondered if any man had ever hated a woman quite as he hated her, and she was his wife. Rosamonde blushed.

"Oh!" she said, "I did want to be—what I used to be—like that picture." She stopped, afraid of his stern eyes.

"Well," he said, with raised eyebrows, "and what has prevented it?"

"You don't care enough," said Rosamonde. The surgeon said nothing, for he knew that it was true. He was stronger than his wife, but he was not stronger than her peculiar and terrible curse, because the one thing that would have made him so was lacking. He could, indeed, break her will, but to cure her he would have had to win her heart. For

Love is the only saviour of the world. Without speaking he turned and left her.

He found Miss Smith outside the door. They exchanged a long, strange glance; at that moment he and the nurse understood each other as they had never done before, and ignored their understanding.

"Give her a cold bath," he said, "and plenty of black coffee, and be in the drawing-room by a quarter to eight. It is now seven—do you understand?"

"Oh! yes, sir," said Miss Smith—she followed the surgeon's figure with a smile—then she went into Rosamonde.

CHAPTER XL.

"No! at noon-day, in the bustle of man's work time,
Greet the unseen with a cheer! Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be!
Strive and thrive! Cry! speed! fight on! fare ever *there* as *here!*"
ROBERT BROWNING.

THE night was dark, and the dinner-table gleamed with light and silver. Long sprays of autumn leaves covered the white cloth, and large pots of early chrysanthemums stood about the room. Katherine, glancing over the faces of the guests, felt an unreasoning anger at their beautiful costumes and easy laughter. The hour she had just spent face to face with her patient's agony seemed the only reality; the dream (which almost made her rub her eyes) was their host's face. Arthur Field had rarely looked more handsome as he glanced across the table at his wife, or flashed keen wit and two-edged compliments at Lady Cheston, sitting at his right hand. Katherine could only rest on the truest of all platitudes, the exceeding strangeness of Truth.

Rosamonde looked flushed and a little stupid. Reggie had frequently to repeat his remarks twice before she understood them. She kept up little bursts of nervous laughter, that made Miss Smith wish to choke her. It was impossible to tell what Arthur Field wished.

"Now you're here, Mr. Field," Lady Cheston began in a voluble aside, "do tell us what Miss Linton's doing, and why that woman, who looks like a poached egg on a rasher of bacon, should manage things for your wife?" Mr. Field glanced down the table at Miss Smith. She certainly looked better in uniform. Her hair, uncapped, was very yellow, and her face, without a dark background, very red.

"Miss Linton," he explained, "came here for a holiday; she's a nurse, you know, in my hospital. I brought her here. She is a nice girl."

"Oh! all girls are nice!" chuckled Lady Cheston, "and all rice puddings are healthy, but I prefer 'em in the nursery."

"As for Miss Smith," said her host, ignoring her interruption, "she is perhaps not what one could call a girl, but she is certainly a treasure."

"In that case," said Lady Cheston, "pray bury her —or send for Captain Kidd!"

Lilian Courteny, who was on Arthur's other side, leaned forward. She was a beautiful woman still, in spite of that inexplicable, hard barrier of an unhappy marriage which was written in her eyes, and in the guarded watchfulness of her proud head. Arthur Field, looking at her, felt that she expected to be made to wince. He had seen the same look in the faces of children with cruel mothers; if you spoke suddenly to them, they put up their hands to protect themselves. Lilian Courtney merely raised her eyebrows and tried to smile, but it gave one the same effect.

"Do you believe in treasures, Mr. Field," she asked. "I always thought doctors and nurses got a little farther than that."

"How far," questioned Arthur, "did you think we got?"

"Far enough," she said, deepening her little smile, "to know that treasures grow best in a fool's paradise."

"Ah," said the surgeon, "I am not so sure that the only paradise belongs to fools; if so, one certainly does well to lose it, yet I am inclined to believe that in becoming more or less wise, one regains the paradise without reassuming the folly."

"And how can you regain it?" Lilian asked lightly. Rosamonde's nervous giggle sounded along the table. Lilian watched him.

"The old way, I suppose," he said slowly; "we go through the world—and die."

"Ah! but I don't want to die," broke in Lady Cheston quickly. "I want, I want—something quite different from that!"

"Then you're still in the Fool's Paradise," said Arthur, "depending upon the unexpected to be favourable." Rosamonde's laugh grew too loud, Lilian stared a little. Miss Smith moved uneasily in her chair. Then the surgeon rose to his feet. Katherine's lips parted; she, too, half-rose from her chair; she noticed the peculiar swaying motion he had when he stood erect; but no one saw her, they were all looking at him. Standing, with his glass in his hand, he made them a little speech. He welcomed them in his wife's name, and in his own, telling them that although the pleasure of their friendship, was for him in anticipation, he felt sure that in this case the reality would be pleasanter still. He told them that his long bachelorhood, owing to his wife's ill-health, he believed, had positively ended, and he congratulated himself on their all being there to celebrate the event. Then, in terms which afterwards, his guests unanimously agreed, were simply touching, he asked them to drink to Rosamonde's health and their future acquaintanceship.

Katherine watched him breathlessly. His eyes shone exultantly, in a kind of savage mastery over his physical weakness. Someone rose opposite to him, and replied courteously and heartily. There was a general tilting up of glasses, and the toast was drunk. Arthur Field leaned forward a little to return thanks. His lips moved, but no words came. Silence fell over the party like a pall. How long it lasted no one could tell. A grey pallor spread over the surgeon's face, his hand shook, the glass slipped out of it on to the floor with a crash, and, with a long, sighing groan, he fell forward on his face. In an instant Katherine was beside him. The guests' attention was called off by Rosamonde—she broke into shriek after shriek of hysterical laughter; Miss Smith went over to her, and shook her. Lady Cheston said, "Well! I never!" There seemed nothing else to say.

Reggie suggested that they should all go into the drawing-room. He and the man who had made the nice little speech carried the surgeon upstairs. When Reggie came down to get some more brandy for Katherine, he found Miss Smith still shaking Rosamonde in the dining-room.

"Hadn't you better take her to her room?" he asked. Miss Smith glared at him, and he hurried away on his errand. After he had gone Miss Smith took Rosamonde by the shoulders, and pushed her, before her, upstairs, and into her room.

Rosamonde fell asleep on her bed, while Miss Smith was undressing her. Lilian Courtney went out into the garden wondering if Arthur Field had regained his Paradise.

Lady Cheston talked a great deal to everybody about the way poor, dear Lord Cheston, who was always eating the wrong things, went off in an apoplectic fit, and her companions listened respectfully, awed by her experience with the unseen; certainly Lord Cheston had died, but they had never fully realized it before. Then a bustling young country doctor who had been called in, came downstairs to say that though undoubtedly Mr. Field was in a serious way, there was no immediate danger, and that his patient had particularly begged him to ask everybody to remain, as he hoped to be about again soon.

"I may say, on my own authority," said the little doctor, with great importance, "that in *my* opinion, I greatly fear my esteemed colleague is not correct in his last statement." A buzz of talk started up after his departure, which was interrupted by Reggie stating lazily that he had lit everybody's candles, and that they would probably all go out soon.

The guests went upstairs on tiptoe, and possibly, for the first time in their lives, noticed that silk skirts are noisy. After all there was no thunderstorm—the clouds had moved on elsewhere. The big harvest moon swung high, and clear over the trees, and rays of moonlight crept through the blind into the surgeon's room. Katherine, sitting by his bedside, thought it was already morning; the night was very long.

"Nurse!" said the voice from the bed. The girl turned towards him startled. He beckoned to her to come nearer.

"Oh! but you mustn't talk!" she said.

"That means I shall not have much longer to talk," he said slowly; "I know that quite well. All the more reason, to my mind, to express myself fully. I have not more than a day or two to live." Katherine put her fingers on his pulse; it was intermittent and very feeble. "A thread with knots," he explained, still smiling; "we shall come by-and-bye to a knot that won't come undone. I have always felt badly at losing a case. It's a thing one can't get used to. Death interferes with skill, and won't explain. When one is puzzling out a sum he rubs it off the slate like a child in a temper, 'I can't do it, and you sha'n't.'" There were pauses between his words. He seemed like a swimmer coming through the surf—he had to dive each wave as it came, or he would be carried off his feet, before the breath came. He was being beaten to exhaustion, but he was a strong swimmer. "Have you ever thought," he went on, "how arbitrary nature is? Idiot children are always very strong; they can't reason, but they can do harm. Nature is like that; she cuts through a law by a catastrophe, and claps her hands at the débris. One can clap too, only in this case, I am the débris." He stopped exhausted, and she gave him a stimulant by his side. "We have learned to make compromises," he said, as she put the glass down, "this will float the débris a little longer."

"Oh! don't talk like that!" said Katherine, feeling an immense pity, and an immense weakness rush over her. "Indeed, indeed there is a reason! a destination! a completion of things! If your powers leave this world it is because there is a fuller, richer channel for them in some other world. There is no waste, no loss." She saw, with passionate terror in her eyes, that he could not follow her. He saw that she was troubled, and he made an effort to understand, but the words were beyond his attenuated powers of sense; he could only shake his head.

"All right," he said, after a little, "don't worry—that was a good thought of yours about the duplicate key." But consciousness in him was too strong a force to be left in abeyance; a moment more and it flashed out again. She saw a new look come into his eyes—a look she had never even dreamed of; it was so infinitely gentle, as if his sight enclosed some picture too fragile to risk a fall.

"What is it?" Katherine asked him.

"You're very good," he whispered, "but I want—Daphne," and his eyes closed to shut out the difference. When he opened them again he looked at her coldly. "You need not sit up, nurse," he said, in usual tones. "I have everything I need."

She leaned over him. "To-morrow," she said, "Daphne goes to stay with Lady Middleton. I heard from her to-day. I will send over for her to come here. You would like to see her." He gazed fixedly in front of him.

"I am—obliged," he said at last. "You are very thoughtful." Katherine felt the tears rush to her eyes, and to avoid his seeing them turned to pull a curtain straight; but she need not have done so, for Arthur Field would not have seen her. His own eyes were full of tears—tears that had never fallen over a grief that had never died.

"Nurse," he said, after a moment. She stood beside him again with the little glass, but he pushed it from him, "don't be cheated," he said, looking at her with piercing eyes, "some things are pretty good, but they don't satisfy, and some things are pretty terrible to face, but they are worth the facing. I can see such a lot now only—it's too late!" Katherine knelt by him, and laid her hand on his.

"No! no! no!" she said, "you leave out God." He lay watching her grieved, earnest eyes.

"So He won't let go?" he said, smiling. "Well, then—if He's there—I'll go to Him, and if He isn't—I'll just rest!" He closed his eyes, and presently as she watched him, she saw that he was asleep.

Then, in a flash, her old thoughts became new to her. She felt a passionate hope and pain, that changed her from a good woman into an infinite being; immortality, which had been her faith, became a certainty. Her life rose from its narrow, outward landmarks, into a thing of eternity, a spark of that which neither knows death, nor accepts it. It seemed in that instant of time, as if she had passed scatheless through a fire, had leapt into some strong, unbroken circle of life in whose centre, was the very source of it all. A fire which indeed consumed, until nothing was left, but the answering spark of Life and Light, unhindered and unfettered utterly. "I will not be cheated," she cried in her heart. "The perishable perishes simply to show the Imperishable its invincible, unutterable Triumph." Her thoughts swept over her past life, catching up memories, hopes, ambitions, as if to hurry with them into the warmth and shelter that had mastered every fear, she had ever known or feared to know. She grew radiant over this new wonder, and longed, as the human soul must long, for the soul she loved best to grow radiant too. Then she ceased to think of things in the abstract, and the face of the man she did not wish to believe she loved, by turns entreated and compelled her to answer, not as she might have answered before the change of a moment had illuminated her life, but with the eternal answer of the heart that sees beyond. "I love—not because you are—but because God is. I am Love's answer to you, your eternal counterpart, which claims us Children of God, who are not afraid to enter into His Courts with the Light of Him in our faces, and the Love of Him in our hearts." So Death and Love together seemed equal pledges to Katherine of other worlds; and duty (by which she had lived before) was a word she had forgotten, she turned quickly to do all she could for Arthur, but not because she ought—ought had lost itself in the privilege of service. The shaded lamp burned low, and the growing outlines of things by the window told her the night was over.

The surgeon's pulse beat very feebly now, his nostrils worked painfully, and his lips were blue. The curious sharpness of feature that the approach of Death reveals showed in his face. She wondered if his spirit could wait till Daphne came. She heard a faint tap at the door, and crept noiselessly to answer it.

The increasing light showed, to her astonishment, Miss Smith. "You cannot come in," said Katherine, "he is asleep."

"I will come in!" hissed the other nurse, "get out of my way!" Katherine gazed at her in surprise, but she was strong, and firmly barred the way against the intruder. "You cannot possibly come in," she repeated, "and if you do not go away, he will wake, and it will kill him!" Miss Smith's glare at her was of something rendered too furious for reason, then, with a sudden, miserable sense of impotence, the poor woman began to shake with sobs. Katherine very gently closed the door and locked it.

"What is it?" said her patient quite composedly.

"Miss Smith, sir, to ask how you were." The surgeon looked annoyed, then his face lightened.

"Let her come in," he said, "but don't go away."

"I shall certainly not do that, sir," said Katherine quickly. She obeyed him unwillingly. Miss Smith hung back at first and came in frightened. She was not placed more at her ease by the surgeon's sharp, cold glance at her.

"Come nearer," he said. "It is very tiresome to have to shout—when one is—dying!"

"Oh, sir—Mr. Field, I mean—you aren't! I can't bear it!" Miss Smith murmured desperately.

"You are not asked to," said the surgeon quietly, "at present. I have sent for you because you are the only person who has ever understood—my wife. I have tried to cure her, that is why I am here. I should like to feel that it has not been quite useless. Will you help her? I have settled most of my money on her, on the condition that she places herself under your orders—or some substitute to be chosen by Miss Linton. If, in ten years' time she is not a complete cure, her income will be very much limited, and you will be freed from the care of her, the rest of my money will then go to the hospital, except that you or your substitute shall have a small income for life. Choose?" He closed his eyes and Katherine held the glass to his lips; he struggled to swallow it, and, after a moment's terrible tension, he rallied. Miss Smith, who had started forward, made up her mind.

"Miss Linton need not look for a substitute, sir!" she cried, "I will stay with your wife until I die, or she dies—so help me, God."

"I daresay He will," murmured the surgeon with an amused look. "If He exists. He certainly ought to—if He can!" Katherine opened the door and Miss Smith, with her heart full of anger and pain, looked passionately and unavailingly at the man who held her in obedience, even at the door of death. Then, seeing that for the moment he had left consciousness behind him, she tossed her head at her enemy and ran to her own room.

Katherine, closing the door again, took up a new wonder. She had seen a small soul in a great moment, but the moment had not been great enough to enlarge the soul. "It takes more to redeem a soul," she remembered hearing. She imagined, as she thought of Miss Smith, that it would take a great deal more.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Simplify, simplify."

THOREAU.

"SHE was certainly dreadfully upset," said Mrs. Ellis. "That laughter was terrible! I always thought there was something a little weak about dear Mrs. Field (I hope you don't mind my saying so, Lilian, though she *is* your aunt). Doctors so often marry hysterical women."

"So many women are hysterical," said Lilian Courtney quietly.

"Well," said Lady Cheston (who had been really upset by last night's scene and did not like to be reminded of it), "here's another drowning accident in the paper this morning; everybody gets drowned this time of the year, and when one thinks of the bathing-dresses some of us wear, I don't wonder! I always tell Reggie I'll wait to go in bathin' till I get to the Dead Sea—where one can't sink, you know."

"But you can't bathe there either, I believe," put in Mrs. Ellis doubtfully. Lady Cheston never made efforts to talk to other women; it was a waste of time and ammunition; besides, she had expected a letter from David, so she merely tossed a Bradshaw to the twins. Everybody felt uncomfortable, and the twins looked up an afternoon train.

"I can't bear being in a house where people die!" remarked an intense young lady in green. She had published a volume of poems at her father's expense. "It makes one feel inexpressible things!"

"Well, don't express them then!" said Lady Cheston shortly. She hated to think about Death, more than she disliked a poor relation. One could say "no" to a poor relation.

The intense girl had two very pink spots on her cheeks, and she ostentatiously took up a beautifully bound little book called "Heart-throbs." It was written by a friend of hers whom she called the "Master." The margins were three inches wide and the poems were remarkably short; but then, as Miss Ingleside would have told you, it was their strength that shook your soul—one, in fact, needed the margin. Mrs. Ellis, who could never restrain what was uppermost in her mind, and whose mind only contained the uppermost, broke forth again.

"It is so specially sad about their being re-united again, and all that, and everybody could see how he adored her!"

"Because he made her a speech?" suggested Lilian lazily, "or because they had lived so long apart?"

"Oh! both!" said Mrs. Ellis a little doubtfully. "Though I never knew Mrs. Field until recently; of course, it all seems very strange."

"Rosamonde was my mother's younger sister," said Lilian clearly to the now-listening room. "And she married a poor country doctor; no one knew that he was going to get on, and in fact the Dormeys had nothing more to do with either of them. Rosamonde was never very strong, and soon after her marriage she grew queer and hysterical, and had to live away somewhere with a nurse. No one knew Mr. Field as a married man, when he came to London, and he was certainly not the person to take the world into his confidence, about his private affairs, besides, he was too busy. When he got on, my mother met him again—one does meet people when they get on, you know. He was always very uncommunicative, and she knew nothing further about Rosamonde until Mr. Field had practically cured her, and brought her home again. There isn't any real mystery, you see." Lilian repeated the story as if it were a lesson she had had to learn by heart. Everybody listened breathlessly, and believed as much of it as went with, what they had already thought out, for themselves.

"How romantic!" murmured little Mrs. Ellis. Lady Cheston put down her paper and snorted she did not believe a word of it, but before she had time to question Lilian, Rosamonde herself came into the room looking almost plain. The ladies all floated up to her with low voices and detached kindlinesses. They made her feel that it was wonderful how brave she was after all she had suffered, and when she was comfortably settled with several unnecessary shawls and cushions—and Miss Ingleside's smelling-salts, without which (she explained) she never moved—they all began to explain how they had to go away, and how dreadful it was to leave her just at this time, but all of them hoped she'd write. They should be waiting so anxiously for news of dear Mr. Field! There was a splendid train at five something, when it would be cool enough to travel, and could they send her anything down from town? Miss Ingleside implored her to try a Faith Healer, a great friend of hers who had effected the most marvellous cures by praying over tumours, positively prevented loads of operations, that would inevitably have proved fatal if they had been performed.

"Perhaps you have heard of her?" she concluded, "Lucia Lovington—she has *such* a soul."

"And such a waist too," murmured Lilian.

"Ah! you know her?" Miss Ingleside asked her.

"Not her soul," said Lilian gently, "only her figure!"

Rosamonde hastened to exclaim that it was awfully sweet of her. "But you see," she exclaimed, "Arthur is a surgeon and doctors never like Faith Healers, they are inclined to call them the New Disease; not that Arthur is at all bitter about them, on the contrary, I have heard him say that if they had a healthy faith and knew the first elements of logic they would do very well. Still, I don't quite think," Rosamonde concluded, " that he would like to see one at present."

Lilian got up and strolled out into the garden. Later, Reggie told her that Daphne was coming to Lady Middleton's and that he was going to drive over for her that afternoon and bring her back with him.

" Miss Linton is very tired," he explained, " she has been up some nights before they came here, and Daphne is quite competent to help her."

" Oh! quite *competent* I should think," assented Lilian.

Reggie felt a little uncomfortable, he couldn't quite tell why. He liked Lilian " awfully " as he phrased it before her marriage, and he did still, but somehow she was not so easy to talk to. He thought it was one of the jolliest days he had ever known, and then reproached himself bitterly for having forgotten the surgeon. In a few hours he would be with Daphne.

As he drove off he was watched by two people, Katherine from the surgeon's window, and Lilian on the lawn. When the dog-cart disappeared, Lilian looked up at Katherine, and something passed between them, intimate, mutual and compassionate. They barely knew each other to speak to, but Katherine knew the outlines of Lilian's story, and they both knew Daphne's, and both of them were very much afraid for Reggie.

CHAPTER XLII.

> "Duty makes us do things well,
> But Love makes us do them beautifully."
>
> PHILIPPS BROOKES.

"OF course," said Mrs. Fordington, "you will do what you like, my dear. You always have done and I shall never interfere. The Bible-Class tea must be put off, but when one has to deal with unmethodical people one must expect changes. Fortunately, Dorket is always nice about orders for food, she will hold it over until you come back." Mrs. Fordington paused, and in the pause Daphne vaguely pictured the stout lady of the village in her kindly attitude of "holding over" the food. "Before you go," her aunt continued, "I hope you will spare time to put some autumn leaves into my bonnet. I thought of cherries, but cherries look better in June. Don't you think so, Daphne?"

"I think they look better in the orchard," said Daphne absent-mindedly.

"I am not referring to trees," said her aunt rather sharply. "I wish you would listen, Daphne, I was talking about hats."

"Oh! *hats!*" said Daphne, with a cheerful smile.

"If you are in town," her aunt went on, "you might have a look at the autumn fashions. I want something that will look smart without being worldly; do you know what I mean, Daphne?"

"Dear me, yes," exclaimed her niece now, thoroughly roused. "At about five guineas—with frills." And she looked out of the window for her uncle.

"Well, don't buy anything out-and-out, but look around you, and let me know," said her aunt; "and I want a new penny reading-book as well, something brighter than a tract but with a deep meaning."

"Amusing without being immoral?" Daphne suggested.

"My dear Daphne! immoral!" cried her aunt, "of course not, it's for the 'Mothers.'"

"It would certainly be easier to find something immoral without being funny," said Daphne, "for the daughters!" Fortunately her aunt was not listening.

"Here is your uncle," she said, "walking across the wet grass, and mark my words, he will try to come in without wiping his feet." It was only too true, and his wife's agonized shriek of "Wilfred, your boots," only brought him to his senses just in time. "You had better change them," said his wife, "and your socks." Daphne went into his study and awaited his return.

When he came down she handed him Vera's invitation. She hoped that he would tell her not to go. She wanted to go, just enough to feel that it would be a pleasant sacrifice not to, and she would have immensely liked to make a sacrifice. Her uncle handed her back the note.

"I think you had better go, dear," he said; "you need a change, and besides, it is only kind not to refuse her request."

"I don't see how I can leave my work," Daphne began.

"Then I am quite sure it is time for you to go," said her uncle, smiling, "and don't come back till you wonder how you can return to it."

"Are we always to distrust our feelings then?" she asked.

"No, certainly not," said the Vicar, "but we mustn't act on them unless we have something else to back them. They are good company but blind guides, you know, and as you have such a large stock of them, Daphne, some of them must conflict. It would do you no harm to make a few reductions."

"I shall have to face temptation!" she said.

"It is in this study," said her uncle.

"Ah! I have not told you everything!" Daphne confessed.

"Tell no one *everything*, my child!" said her uncle, "and do not tell many people anything. I have always noticed that young people are dangerously fond of the verb 'to tell.' When you reach my age you will have learned to put a negative before many of these vigorous intentions. Confidences make secrets, and secrets make mischief."

"Oh! but one must trust people!" cried Daphne.

"By all means," said her uncle, "*have* as much confidence as you like in people, but don't *make* confidences *to* people, that is quite a different thing."

"Then you wish me to go?" she protested. His eyes twinkled at her feminine leap.

"I shall miss you very much, dear child," he said quietly.

Daphne went over to him, and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh," she said, "I don't want to leave you!"

"Then it seems as if we were both doing right," said her uncle.

Mrs. Fordington had hoped the Vicar would come down to her; she felt vaguely aggrieved about her husband. "Wilfred," she often told people, "was as close as a fish about some things." She was quite willing for Daphne to go, only she would have liked to talk over the objections. She never let anything happen without talking over the objections; it was what she called "having a thing out," and the study door was shut. Mrs. Fordington had learned soon after her marriage what that meant, though the Vicar's courteous "What may I do for you, dear?" was as far as from turning her out as possible, yet that was what it had effected. She remembered that in their early married days she had felt it her duty to sound his faith, and walking boldly into his study, had poured forth her views to him on Hell and everlasting punishment; when she had finished, he had said to her very gently that she might believe exactly what she chose, he would never interfere with it, he would not even contradict her as to her statement about the Andersons, but she must never, under any circumstances, teach these doctrines in his parish.

"What, Wilfred," she had cried, "don't you even believe that those backbiting Dissenters *must* go to Hell?"

"I feel quite sure," her husband had replied, "that there will be no backbiting nor dissent in Heaven; but I very much hope the Andersons will be there, with their generosity and their kind hearts." His wife had got up in despair.

"Wilfred," she had said, "this is terrible! We have nothing in common about Hell." The Vicar had bowed his head and she had left him.

Suddenly she saw the gardener sitting, actually sitting with clasped hands upon his wheelbarrow; she went out into the garden and drew his attention with severe emphasis to some neglected weeds. In doing this she scolded both her husband and Daphne, and could go and make the tea with unruffled feelings. Mrs. Fordington did not believe in sending scapegoats out into the wilderness, she liked them within easy reach. Two days after Daphne travelled to Lady Middleton's, missing, by a post, a letter from Katherine about Arthur Field.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"And woman's slander is the worst!"

TENNYSON.

VERA agreed with the world at large that Tit-for-Tat is the ruling Principle, but she went on a step beyond in her ethics, in her ability to keep "Tat" for the appropriate moment. She lay on the sofa with a French novel and awaited Daphne's arrival. She could see the carriage-drive from where she lay, and when she saw Reggie drive up, she closed her novel; it was not one she would quite like Reggie to see her read. When he was announced she held out her hand languidly.

"My dear Reggie," she said, "this is really very nice of you. I have wanted to hear for ages how you liked your prospective stepfather?" Reggie took a moment selecting the most comfortable chair he could find. Then he turned his pleasantest and blankest expression to Lady Middleton.

"Why," he said, "I haven't been introduced to him yet. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Then you have not come to tell me about him?" she said with disappointment. She had not quite courage enough to break the news to him herself, but, of course, if he insisted on knowing he could not blame her. To her surprise he dropped the subject and briefly announced his purpose. Vera rose to her feet and then sank back again on to the cushions.

"Daphne," she repeated, "Daphne! You have come to fetch Daphne to nurse Arthur Field?"

"Yes," said Reggie, "I have."

"This," said Vera dramatically, "is terrible!" She watched Reggie beneath her eyelashes.

"It is very sad, isn't it?" said he. He was absolutely unimpressed. She turned to him gravely and quietly:

"Reggie," she said, "I don't quite know what to do. What you have just told me has put me into a most difficult position. You have always been a friend of the family, and I must have some advice——"

"Your husband?" Reggie interrupted her.

"Is in London," said Vera quickly, "Daphne is a motherless girl. I did not come to her in time. Oh! if it had been a few months earlier—I might have helped the poor child, I might have saved her!"

"What do you mean, Lady Middleton?" Reggie asked her sternly. Vera shuddered.

"It is dreadful—dreadful to have to tell you!" she said. "I do not know how she first got to know

Arthur Field, but she fell desperately in love with him before she knew that he was already married. I was shocked and terrified when I discovered the state of things, and felt it my duty to tell her the whole story immediately. I told her—two weeks too late!" Reggie got up and went to the window. He heard the sound of wheels coming from the station road. Vera looked at her watch, she had at least ten minutes. "I broke off the affair at once," she went on, "and for the girl's sake kept it entirely quiet. I never even told her father. I blame myself for that now." The wheels passed the gate. There was a girl and a man in the dog-cart laughing. Vera sighed deeply. "I urged her engagement to David, although in many ways I felt he was unsuitable. I was afraid to break off completely with Arthur Field; he is a dangerous man, and for the girl's sake I had to be careful. He came to me at Overham, and I believed she struggled against his power over her—but I had to send him away. Then she went to his hospital and I gave her up. I had done all I could for her. Rosamonde's return did, indeed, give me fresh hope, and as Arthur Field was not here I asked her to come to me again, but if she goes to him now, what am I to do? Is it not my duty to hush up this affair? No one will believe in the nursing story, and Daphne will not know that he ever sent for her? You are sure he is dying?"

"Quite sure," said Reggie. The sound of wheels came near again, and Vera saw that her ten minutes were over.

"Let us say nothing at all about it?" she pleaded.

"I think I must give my message to Miss Fordington," said Reggie steadily. The trap drove in at the gate, and he saw Daphne. Devonshire air had filled her face with life and colour, her eyes gleamed with happy expectation, she sprang lightly to the ground. In a moment more she was in the room, and Vera was murmuring "Dear child," and ringing for the tea.

Reggie turned slowly, and faced her. Her colour deepened, and her eyes, when they met his, were full of a welcome, that a few minutes before would have made the world beautiful to him. He held out his hand frigidly.

"You must have had a long journey, Miss Fordington," he said. Daphne turned away to the tea-table. For a moment she was speechless, and afraid that he would see, that he had hurt her.

Then, with a merry laugh, she broke into a history of her journey and its incidents. Vera, watching her, could tell nothing. She waited until Daphne had finished her tea before she turned to Reggie.

"Now, Reggie," she said, "tell Daphne why you have come?" Then, leaning back in her chair, she looked from one to the other of them. Reggie's eyes were fixed straight in front of him.

"I came to ask you to assist Miss Linton who is nursing a case in the neighbourhood at the house where I am staying," he said; "perhaps you did not get her letter?"

"No," said Daphne, wonderingly, "I thought she was off for her holiday."

"She has been sitting up some nights, and she begged that if you were not too tired you would drive over with me and relieve her to-night." He paused.

"Of course I will," said Daphne; "who is the patient?"

"It is someone you know," said Reggie. Then Daphne knew that he was going to break some news to her; she put her cup down very carefully and looked at him, but he would not meet her eyes.

"It is Mr. Arthur Field," said Reggie. Vera watched Daphne's face with increasing pleasure. All her happy colour had left her, her hands grasped the chair, with that strange clinging to the inanimate that terror gives. For the moment the room was so still that the country world about them seemed full of noises; it might have been London.

"Is he so very ill?" the girl asked finally.

"Very ill," said Reggie. Vera saw that he would not see how white Daphne was, nor how stricken, she had her voice in such perfect control.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "are you going to faint? Shall I ring for some brandy?" Daphne got up.

"You have a trap here?" she asked Reggie. "I saw it at the door."

" Are you going ? " Vera asked her. " I am sure it is not really necessary."

" I am going," said Daphne, with a sudden flash of anger, " whether it is necessary or not." Vera looked at Reggie, and had the pleasure of seeing him wince.

" I am quite at your services, Miss Fordington," he said drily. They left the room in silence. As the cart drove off, she gave a sigh of perfect satisfaction. There are a good many rewards that virtue does not give. Vera felt as if she had them all, and virtue into the bargain. She had always been very good to Daphne, on her twenty-first birthday she had sent her a pearl necklace.

CHAPTER XLIV.

> "Ah! let none other alien spell so'er
> But only the One Hope's, One name be there—
> Not less nor more, but even that word alone."
>
> ROSSETTI.

IT was six o'clock and growing dark, only across the fields, rich with a late harvest, the last light caught colour from the goldern corn, lying in rippling fields beneath the hills. The air was fresh and sweet, and the shadows lay sharp and clear over the country. Reggie drove very fast, and Daphne saw nothing but old memories.

"Is he dying?" she said at last.

"Yes," said Reggie.

"Oh!——" murmured Daphne. Reggie lashed the horse, it danced a little, and quickened its pace. Daphne did not notice that they were driving much too fast. "Reggie," she said at last, "why did you call me 'Miss Fordington'? I don't believe you were a bit glad to see me!" Reggie was simply furious; that she could dare to make him such a speech at the present moment, showed that she was not only thoroughly bad, but cruelly heartless. That at the time, when the man who ought to have been her husband was dying, she could observe the greeting of another man, struck him as about the lowest and vainest thing he could imagine.

" I do not think we need discuss my feelings," he said, " they are not your concern, nor ought they to be." Daphne look at him in hurt surprise.

" Oh ! Reggie ! " she said, " I can't understand you."

" It is just as well," he said coldly, " that you should not." They barely escaped running over a child, and Daphne caught his arm in terror. Then he looked at her, it was a look of such absolute disgust that it stung her like a whip.

" Does he suppose I am trying to flirt with him ? " she thought. Her only wish now was for the drive to end. The garden was deserted, everyone had left but Lilian. She stood in the hall to welcome Daphne ; it was years since they had met, and Lilian held her close to her, in silence. Reggie did not see their meeting, he drove furiously to the station and caught the last train up. There was nothing especial for him to do in town, so he took the night express to Scotland, but his troubled thoughts kept pace even with the Edinburgh express.

" Am I too late ? " said Daphne. Lilian shook her head, and they went upstairs hand in hand.

" It has been a fight against the hours," Lilian told her, "but I do not think he could die until he saw you."

"And his—wife?" said Daphne.

"Is dressing for dinner," replied Lilian simply. "He will not see her, and she would not go to him if she could, I think. Oh! my dear, it's a terrible business."

"Oh, Arthur," said Daphne, "I can't imagine him helpless——" she bit her lips to keep the tears back. "I only knew this afternoon," she explained.

The surgeon's room had that atmosphere of utter calm, and order in which the mind has only itself to fight against. All the windows were wide open, and by the light of the shaded lamp, Daphne saw his grey face, propped up by many pillows. His hands plucked at the counterpane, with futile, unpausing fingers. Daphne remembered how they had boasted of them in hospital, as the most beautifully formed hands in London, and she understood that their work was done, as no amount of mere terrible reports of him could have shown her. Hope can keep alive against all reason, until sight stuns it with reality. When she saw his face, the rest of the world vanished, and she knew that nothing at all existed but his fight with the unseen. She did not notice Katherine until the other pointed out to her, the little compromises with death that he himself had brought down with him. Then she left them. Daphne sat by his side and put his hand over one of his. He looked at her and smiled as a child does who has been looking for its mother.

He had passed beyond surprises, and forgotten all his troubles, but he knew that she was there.

"It's all right, Daphne," he said, "they told you it was all right, didn't they?" he repeated, frowning a little.

"Yes," said Daphne, "it is *quite—quite* all right now." He was satisfied, and lay watching her face in absolute restfulness, only his fingers still picked fruitlessly at the counterpane.

Three hours later Katherine looked in at them, they neither of them moved, and until she died she never forgot the picture that they made. The firelight (which in spite of the summer the chill of failing life made good to him) flickered "with subtle sound of flame." And the moonbeams flooded the room. Daphne was still beside him, but now her arm lay beneath his head holding him up, her other hand was on his, and her dark eyes were filled with light. When Katherine saw his face, she came in, and closed the door, for she saw that there was another presence in the room. The end had come, but they neither of them heard her.

"God keep you, Arthur," Daphne said. For a moment the old, amused look came back into his failing eyes.

"He—won't—let—go!" he whispered. The effort was too much for him, the breath stopped with one short gasp. His weight on her arm was terribly heavy. She looked at Katherine.

"I don't see why *you* should cry," she said. Then her own lips quivered, she buried her head in her hands. Steps sounded outside the door, and Katherine went to it.

"I'm his nurse!" sobbed Miss Smith. "I always nursed his cases!"

"Yes! yes," said Katherine gently, "but he doesn't want either of us now, he——" Miss Smith broke away from her, and rushed into Rosamonde's room.

"You've killed your husband!" she cried. "Do you hear me? You've killed your husband!"

"Oh! how horrible!" cried Rosamonde. "How dare you frighten me so, I sha'n't be able to go to sleep, I must have some——"

"No! you don't!" cried Miss Smith, her sobs ceased. She began to make Rosamonde some coffee on a spirit lamp.

Arthur had done the kindest thing he could for her when he gave her something to do for him. Almost as kind as if he had known, but it was always impossible to tell what he knew.

CHAPTER XLV.

"For the storm, and the rain, and the darkness borrow
But an hour from the suns to be,
But a strange swift passage, that we
May rejoice, who have mourned to-day, to-morrow
In the sun, and the wind, and the sea."

SWINBURNE.

IT was impossible for Katherine to realize anything in the quick days that followed. A dressmaker from town, a morning when the hall was filled with wreaths, the grim, tearful face of Miss Smith, the departure of Lilian and Daphne, passed by her like scenes in a theatre.

It was not until the funeral had taken place, and the last wreath lain upon the newly-dug grave, that Katherine realized her task was over. She noticed that the handsomest of all the flowers was a cross of lilies of the valley and white roses sent by Lady Middleton. People had come down to the funeral. One or two of Mr. Field's well-known colleagues, he had few personal friends, and no relations. There was something infinitely pathetic to Katherine in the impersonal, almost professional aspect of the scene.

It was just as he would have liked. Rosamonde was too upset to go, and Miss Smith stayed with her, but after it was all over, she crept into the empty cemetery and cried the most futile and unsatisfying of all tears. Tears over death which (at any rate, to Arthur) had been the least of his troubles. When Katherine re-entered the house Rosamonde met her in the hall.

"When are you going, nurse?" she asked her curtly.

"I—I suppose I had better go now," said Katherine. "There is nothing else, is there, that I can do?"

"You can pack your things," said Rosamonde. Katherine went upstairs to the little dressing-room next to his room, where she was to have slept if it had been possible. Her things had been barely unpacked, and it was easy to put them up again. A few hours later she reported herself at the hospital. The Matron sent for her at once.

"You will take your holiday now, nurse," she said. Then, for a moment, she forgot her position. "We were all so proud of him!" she said. "God knows I wish we could have saved him! There never was such a man for hip troubles—and as an operator——! and for all his sharp ways, he was the kindest-hearted man I know!" The Matron shook her head. As Katherine went to her room she passed a bevy of nurses just going on night duty. They were discussing the new consultant.

"He has such a lovely moustache," said one of them. Katherine fled past them hurriedly. She did not wish to have to hear about the new consultant.

The next day found her at Link-Water, the house her father had taken. It was a little house with a sunny lawn leading down to the river. Mrs. Dalgeny welcomed her very warmly, the Colonel was away, and as she watched her mother sewing under the great yellowing trees, she could not realize that the two past years were more than a vivid dream, only that she felt so very much older than her mother.

"It is all very curious," said Mrs. Dalgeny, "but you really seem to have improved. I had no idea that what you call your profession was so becoming. At one time you quite threatened to be fat. Now your figure is not unlike mine at your age, though *I* was a mother then," added Mrs. Dalgeny, thoughtfully.

"Are you happy?" asked Katherine bluntly, "with —with him?" Mrs. Dalgeny laughed.

"Dear child," she said, "you still have your crude, odd way of putting things! I did not marry Colonel Dalgeny from any fairy-tale motives. I knew just what I might expect. He is obstinate, selfish, and absurdly scrupulous. I am fond of my own way and of my own pleasure, and I believe in expedients, but nevertheless we get on capitally. Do you ask me how?" said Mrs. Dalgeny, putting down her embroidery. "Because I feed him beautifully, and let him smoke where he likes. I am always well-dressed, and if I do not agree with him, I do not tell him so. I also never ask him where he has been, or what he is going to do, and I arrange my life for myself. There are wives who tell their husbands when they have made a mistake about a joint and expect him to look up their trains for them. An unhappy marriage in such cases is inevitable. I know the value of reserve. If he asks me why I do a thing I give him a reason he can understand. If he is angry with me, I confess that I am in the wrong, and cry. After that he naturally calls himself a brute, and I remain where I was. This makes everything quite simple, and I always make a point of listening to his suggestions."

"Oh, mother!" said Katherine, "how horrible!"

"Oh, but I don't follow them!" explained Mrs. Dalgeny.

Katherine saw the uselessness of Reformers. One can change the external, but when one tackles human nature the spots remain, and it is considered unbalanced to go quite so far.

"He must be desperately unhappy," she thought. Then, looking up, she saw the Colonel crossing the lawn. Mrs. Dalgeny carefully placed her embroidery upon another chair and advanced to meet him, signalling to an open window for the maid to bring out tea. It might have been an awkward moment, but it was not. As the pair crossed the lawn to Katherine, the Colonel had already begun to tell his wife what had happened to him in town. After he had shaken hands with his daughter, he turned to his wife again.

"They gave me a beastly lunch," he said, sitting down comfortably in a garden chair. Mrs. Dalgeny sent a veiled glance at her daughter. It was her moment of triumph, and the Colonel immensely enjoyed his tea. Katherine was disgusted.

"He is too comfortable to be unhappy," she thought contemptuously. After tea Mrs. Dalgeny rose gracefully and left them. The Colonel regarded his daughter thoughtfully for awhile.

"Do you think your mother is looking well?" he asked her at last. "Are you satisfied about her?" Katherine looked out over the water. The shadows had deepened and lay long and dark across it; she could scarcely see her father's face, but she could hear the wistful tone in his voice, and at last she understood. It was quite true that her mother had made him comfortable, but it was also true that she could never make him happy. Katherine trembled for a moment, then she put out her hand to him.

"Father," she said, "I—I didn't understand!" The Colonel pressed her hand, but he did not try to answer her, something in his throat choked him. By-and-bye he leant over her and kissed her. Then, as it was growing cool, he drew her hand in his arm, and they walked up and down the lawn together. Katherine told him all about her work.

Mrs. Dalgeny saw them from her bedroom window, and the satisfied smile left her face. Of course her husband thought her a very clever woman, but this was different, even Mrs. Dalgeny saw that. The Colonel talking with his daughter down below, was very happy. He would not have been so happy if his wife had joined them. Mrs. Dalgeny tried to sneer, but it is difficult to sneer when one's lips are trembling. She called out of the window, "Katherine, it is time to dress for dinner!" but she could not always call her daughter in.

CHAPTER XLVI.

> "How we are made for happiness! how work
> Grows play, adversity a winning fight!"
>
> ROBERT BROWNING.

KATHERINE felt certain, as soon as she saw Bert, that he was keeping something back. He looked older and very much more determined, and there was a restless, anxious expression in his eyes. He got on singularly well, she noticed, with her mother, and her father, though he left his wife to do most of the entertaining, smoked in evident enjoyment of his company. Katherine was anxious that her father should like him, but she was more anxious that he should like her father.

"I have got," said Mrs. Dalgeny, "to decorate the church for the Harvest Festival to-morrow, and I want some Autumn leaves, and things to hang down and drape well. Suppose you and Katherine go out and get them, Mr. Russell, and meet me at the church. The fields are certain to be wet and Katherine immensely enjoys discomfort, as I know by experience. It makes you feel like an early

Christian Martyr, doesn't it, dear?" she asked her daughter.

"On the contrary," Katherine replied, "it makes me feel capable of becoming a savage."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Dalgeny lightly. "Saints and savages were both very primitive, and could afford to get their feet wet. I shall stay here, and drive to the church later." She dismissed them with a smile of content. After they had left the room she turned to the Colonel. "Katherine," she said, "is twenty-five, she will never marry sensibly. This young man is delightful, but certain to be poor. Nevertheless one might do worse, she must marry him." The Colonel smoked in silence.

"You have a way of talking about these things," he said at last, "which I don't like, Louie; and it is no use saying 'must' to Katherine."

"I should never dream of saying it to Katherine," said his wife, smiling, "I was saying it to you. I told Katherine last night I did not see much in him." The Colonel was curious.

"What did she say?" he ventured.

"Why—nothing!" said Mrs. Dalgeny, "but a few moments afterwards, she suggested he might stay over Sunday."

"I wish you weren't so infernally sly, Louie," said her husband, angrily. "I don't want Katherine to marry anybody." His wife laughed.

"Men never like their daughters to marry," she said, "and mothers never like them to be old maids. It is very easily explained. You can see the drawbacks of marriage for any woman except your wife, and your wife can see its consolations for any woman but herself. Besides, no woman likes to have an elderly daughter with grown-up critical eyes for ever in the drawing-room."

"Do you know, Louie," he said slowly, "sometimes you strike me as being very hard?" Mrs. Dalgeny laughed.

"That is the way sensible people always strike one," she said; "but I can assure you that it is really only the sentimentalists who are brutal, and I am quite sure men are much more prone to that than women, they call things by such easy names, and throw sunbeams over their past. Sunbeams are much nicer to get on with than remorse."

"What do you know about remorse, I wonder?" asked her husband in a queer voice.

"I know it is a very uncomfortable thing to have," said Mrs. Dalgeny, "and also a little absurd. Now I am going to drive to the church. Can I do anything for you in the village?" The Colonel shook his head.

The autumn fields were rough with dew, and the trees gave a light of dusky gold in response to the bright sunshine breaking its way through the river mist. The dampness of the place brought out wonderful tones of crimson and brown, and the woods on the horizon were shaded black and mauve.

"English autumn is more toned down than our Fall," said Katherine's companion. "We die in a blaze of madness, but your old English trees drift softly into death with quiet colours. They are too old to make a fuss!"

"Ah! but we understand it is all coming back to us," said Katherine eagerly. "I like that best; we are content because we know that death is a phase and life a permanence. The faith of generations has made us calm and sure;" her thoughts went back to the surgeon. "Mr. Field must have been sure," she said, "or he couldn't have been so brave, only he didn't *know* he was sure. Don't you think, Mr. Russell, that all good people—people, I mean, who have struggled to live up to a standard—are immensely looked after, and unconsciously possessed by the God they think they do not believe in?

"Of course, conscious faith is best, because it is so much simpler, and one can meet things with it so much more possibly, but an unconscious faith seems to me to have a wonderful hold upon unseen powers."

"Yes," said Bert, "I guess that God's belief in us is the bigger of the two, and can keep a hold of us just as long as we don't fight against it with our character. What we think we know, and what we believe we think, is a precious little part of it all, and fortunately not such a very large part of us." Katherine caught a branch above her head and broke it short with a turn of her wrist. "My! but you're strong!" said Bert, admiringly. Katherine flushed.

They had their arms full of leaves, red, brown, and gold, and about them both was the bloom of the fresh, sweet morning. They sat down to rest on a fallen trunk, and Bert Russell turned his bright, dark eyes on her.

"I am going home," he said; "England has had enough of me." Katherine put down her armful of leaves, and bent over to sort them.

"I thought you had work here," she said.

"Why, yes! I have work," said Bert, thoughtfully, "but I can't get on! They don't want me to. I want to press ahead and make the other papers jump, but they don't seem to want the other papers to jump. They're quite willing for the whole lot to crawl. Now I didn't come over here to crawl. Besides, I can't make enough money here; I am going to be married, and I want some more money pretty quick."

"Yes," said Katherine, "marriage is very expensive, isn't it?" (It was really too cold to sit out in October; she might be strong, but she felt very tired. If he married an American girl, he would have to go out for his walks alone.) "I am so glad," Katherine said, "so very glad; do you care for her very much?"

"Why, yes," said Bert, "with all my heart, or I wouldn't want to marry her." (He was capable of changing his heart very quickly, Katherine thought.) "You'll be good to her?" he said gently, "won't you?"

"I shall not have much opportunity to be good to her if you are to live in America," Katherine said, a little stiffly. She loved the way his hair grew at the back of his neck, and the queer little way he had of wrinkling up his forehead, as if it helped him to think. She wondered if the American girl noticed these things.

"I have my doubts as to whether I ought to marry her," he went on; "I am not very well off, you know, and she has a profession of her own which I don't like asking her to give up."

"You won't need to ask her to give it up," said Katherine in a low voice, "if she cares for you, and she'd love to have you poor so that she could help you."

"She'd have to live a long way from her home," he continued.

"Nonsense!" said Katherine briskly, "she will make her own home; women are not so incapable as you seem to think! Even if you wanted her to go to a strange country she would probably manage very well."

"Well—I do want her to go to a different country," said Bert, watching the way she was trying to arrange her leaves and—failing. "See here," he said, "let me fix those for you," and he took them out of her hand

Their fingers touched, and involuntarily Katherine gave a little cry.

"I ran a splinter into my finger," she explained. And then she blushed furiously and hated herself, because it was not true. "Then she's an English girl?" she said carelessly.

"Yes—she's an English girl," said Bert. There was something in his voice that made her turn and look at him. He was wrinkling up his forehead, but his eyes were dancing with fun and tenderness.

"Oh!" she cried, springing to her feet. "How dare you! What do you mean?"

"Is there another splinter in your finger?" he said. "I am a real good hand at taking them out." He spoke lightly, but he was terribly afraid; he had risked everything, and Katherine's eyes were blazing. "Katherine," he said, "oh! Katherine, it's so much to ask a woman to give up! Do you think she'll come back with me?" Katherine looked away for a moment; when her eyes met his again the anger had quite gone.

"There—there wasn't a splinter in my finger," said Katherine.

Mrs. Dalgeny waited for half an hour in the church. Then she got some Virginia Creeper from a cottage near by. It did just as well.

"Do you wish him told?" said the Colonel. They stood together by the fire in the library. He had been very good to her and it had, none of it, been so difficult as she had thought.

" I am not afraid of his knowing," she said, a little proudly. " It would make no difference."

" Men don't look at these things in the same light as women do," said the Colonel. " But it would be very hard for me and your mother——" he paused a moment. " I could not tell her that I had done it," he finished gravely, " she would not understand."

" You think he should know ? " said Katherine. The Colonel looked into the fire ; it is hard to answer " yes " or " no " to most questions worth asking, and it is very hard to inflict one's own punishment.

" It seems to me his due," he said at last.

" Then I am quite sure you will tell him," said his daughter. There was a long pause ; the Colonel walked up and down his room, and bit his grey moustache rather savagely. He came to a stand in front of his daughter.

" Katherine," he said, " this Russell is a poor man, and I am very well off. You are my only child. Two years ago I offered you an allowance which you would not take. I do not think anything has ever hurt me quite so much. Will you take it now ? " The girl hesitated, but only for a moment.

" Thank you," she said simply, " thank you very much, it will be a great help to us." The door opened and Bert Russell came in.

" Help," he said, " who's going to help us."

"My father," said Katherine quietly as she left the room. A few moments later he joined her in the drawing-room. She was playing on the piano, and he came up behind her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Why, Katherine!" he said, "my Katherine! you're crying!"

"No, I'm not," said Katherine furiously, brushing away the tears from her eyes. "Only—only I was thinking of what you said about temptation, do you remember? You said, 'sometimes the oughts drop out.'"

"Well—have they?" laughed her lover.

"No," said Katherine, "only I can see quite well how they might."

"And you don't go on treating people as they deserve?" he asked her, his eyes twinkling.

"You can ask me that?" said Katherine. "Oh! Bert, I don't treat you as you deserve!"

"No!" he said, smiling down at her, "you only treat me the way I'd like to deserve!" Katherine shook her head.

"You deserve more than I can ever give you," she said, "but I will give you all I can." Bert slipt his arm about her—and kissed her forehead.

"Do you know," he said, "I somehow guess it *does* make a difference after all."

The Colonel, sitting in his study opposite the picture of his dead wife, had buried his face in his hands. He had loved her, and she had been a very good woman, and yet he had sinned. Now he was face to face with the emptiness of future years—and must for ever carry in his heart "the torment of the difference till he die."

CHAPTER XLVII.

Yea, in God's name, and Love's, and thine, would I
Draw from one loving heart such evidence
As to all hearts, all things should signify;
Tender as dawn's first hill-fire and intense
As instantaneous penetrating sense,
In spring's birth hour, of other springs gone by."

ROSSETTI.

"DO you know," said Daphne, leaning back luxuriously on a sofa in Lilian's boudoir, "I met an old friend of mine this afternoon in the park, and he was very much afraid of me." Lilian smiled affectionately.

"I wonder why an old friend always means the man we didn't marry?" she said; "but I don't wonder that he was afraid of you, Daphne."

"Well—he was!" said Daphne, ignoring her friend's remark, "and he said that he was going out as a missionary to India, and that he was very happy."

"Poor fellow!" said Lilian gently.

"I never really meant to marry him," said Daphne.

"I suppose it was what Reggie quarrelled with me about, but I told him I was sorry, and then I went to Overham, and it was all over. You know he wouldn't speak to me when I was at your mother's, and he came to fetch me to nurse Arthur." Lilian sat up straight.

"Was he with my mother when you arrived?" she asked.

"Yes," said Daphne, shuddering, "they were sitting there together. He told me, and at first I didn't understand—oh! it was awful! Reggie was horribly unkind. He wouldn't speak to me or help me a bit!" Lilian looked at her friend thoughtfully.

"I wonder if you would tell me the truth, Daphne," she said, "if I were to ask you a pretty straight question?" Daphne looked startled.

"I suppose I might," she said.

"Do you mind Reggie's being horrid?" said Lilian. Daphne fidgeted a moment, then she looked at her friend steadily.

"Well, yes, Lilian," she said, "I do. No one likes to be thought despicable by a man like Reggie."

"I am going to see my mother this afternoon," said Lilian. "Have you everything you want?"

"Everything, thanks," said Daphne. "Lilian, do you mind seeing your mother now?" she asked her suddenly; "I have always wanted to ask you—you don't mind, do you? Are you still desperately unhappy?" Lilian sat down again.

"No," she said in a low voice, "not now." Daphne waited. "My husband was so very bad," Lilian went on at last, "that it simplified matters. I could have got a divorce any day, so he went his way, and I went mine. There were terrible hours first. It is so hard to realize evil; one hears of it in church on Sunday, and people talk about bad books, and bad plays, but it is *quite*—quite different from that! You see, there are so many other things to be considered. It gets mixed up with one's life; by-and-bye it becomes usual. It is easier to get used to than good, I think; I wasn't a bit shocked after the first year. If I had had a child it would have been different; I should have had to leave him then."

"And there was never any one else?" said Daphne. Lilian played with a book on her lap.

"Yes," she said, in a very low voice, "there might have been someone else. I do not know how far it would have gone. God knows I was pretty desperate, and so was he. Then one day I went out for a drive, and we ran over a child. Daphne, it was horrible! I thought it was dead. I took it to the nearest hospital, and they were so good to me, the nurses—I shall never forget! They let me stay there till the surgeons saw it, and they came back to tell me it would live. After that I went to see it every day, and by-and-bye I got to know such lots of darling little children, and I have been to see them two or three times a week ever since—that's all."

"And the man?" said Daphne.

"I could not give up the love of little, innocent children even for him," said Lilian softly. "I told him about it, and I asked him to go away, and he did. He is married now to such a sweet, nice girl, and he has little children of his own. I shall never have that," said Lilian, with the tears running down her cheeks; "only, all the little children in the world seem mine, when I look at them!"

"Ah! Lilian! Lilian!" said Daphne. When Lilian had gone Daphne sat alone by the fire-light thinking of her friend's story. It was so very different from Katherine's. She had been to see them off, Katherine and Bert, and the docks at Southampton had looked like Paradise to them, a station on the way to Heaven. Katherine had tyrannized over Bert to her heart's content and ended by always doing what he wished, and Bert, pretending to be badly treated, had been so immensely proud, and they started off for their new life across the sea in the absurdest and most childish manner possible, as if the world had been a room full of hidden Christmas presents, and they had just set out to find them all. Daphne had been happy when she was with them, but now the world had grown cold and grey. It was hard to go back to Overham. Rosamonde and Miss Smith had taken a flat in town, she and Lilian had been to see them, and, as far as they could see, all was going on well. It seemed as if, after all, Arthur's sacrifice had not been as useless as he thought. She had no excuse for staying in town any longer, and yet she felt conscious that she was going back, unsatisfied, unrested, uninclined even for her boys and her club, and the sight of her uncle's loving eyes.

The door opened, and she started at the lapse of time. Lilian had come back, and it was their last evening.

"Oh! come and talk to me," she said; "I want someone to talk to me!" The words died on her lips, for it was not Lilian, but Reggie who stood at the door.

"I—I am awfully sorry," he stammered, "but Mrs. Courtney told me to come in; I met her at a squash somewhere, and she told me you were at home——"

"And that I would be delighted to see you, I suppose?" said Daphne icily, but she sat down again.

"No—no!" said Reggie. *I* told her—*that*, the other way round, you know!"

"You seem a little involved," said Daphne coldly. There was an awkward silence; Reggie watched her face with eager, unembarrassed eyes, and Daphne, knowing that there was a change, became the more anxious not to commit herself.

"I say," said Reggie at last, "it's ages since I've seen you, isn't it?"

"I believe it is two months," said Daphne; "I have not thought it long." Her manner plainly inferred that she would have liked it to be indefinitely longer. Reggie's eyes twinkled; she looked irresistible when she was angry, the fire-light showed the gleam of her eyes—and the impatient tapping of her foot.

"That awfully nice friend of yours has gone and got married to that American chap, hasn't she?" he asked her cheerfully.

"Yes," said Daphne, and she seemed to think it a sufficient answer.

"My mother is to be married," he began in a graver tone, "to David Grey."

"Oh, Reggie!" said Daphne quickly, "I'm so sorry!" Then she could have bitten her tongue out at her indiscretion—Reggie moved into a chair nearer her—she had forgotten he was so tall.

"Thank you—dear," he said. Daphne blushed, but she kept her face steadily from him; she had made a false step, and she had to pay the forfeit. The room was singularly quiet; in the street below the cries of evening papers, and a belated muffin-bell came up to them quite clearly. "Daphne," Reggie said in quite a different tone, "I'm afraid you'll think me an awful cur for what I am going to tell you, but you'll listen, won't you? You won't be dreadfully angry till I've quite finished?"

"You're very inconsistent in your use of my name," she said, taking a fire-shield from the mantelpiece.

"Ah—listen," he exclaimed impatiently—"and please promise?" There was a queer little smile round Daphne's lips, but it did not matter—she had the fire-shield in position.

"I don't see quite what difference it makes," she said, "but, of course, I'll promise you not to get angry *until* you're finished." Reggie drew a long breath.

"It's going to be horribly difficult to tell you," he said. "Well, that day I came over to fetch you back. Lady Middleton was there, and she told me—she told me——"

"What did she tell you?" cried Daphne, her eyes flashing.

"Remember your promise," he reminded her. "She told me—lies about you and that surgeon chap."

"What were they?" asked Daphne.

"I sha'n't tell you," said Reggie.

"Oh—and you believed them?" she cried.

"Yes, I believed them," said Reggie.

"And you dare to come here and tell me so?"

"Yes, Daphne," said Reggie, "I know they aren't true, and—and I couldn't help coming." He laid his hand over hers, and pleaded with her with his eyes. Daphne sprang to her feet.

"Oh! and you wish to flirt with me, do you?" she cried. "I can imagine you would think me a fit subject! You 'couldn't help coming'—that was a pretty way of putting it, Lord Cheston." Then, as it came over her, *who* had failed her, that he had always been, even when she was angry with him, the man she trusted and relied upon, she had hard work to fight back her tears. "Oh, Reggie! Reggie!" she said, "I did think you were a better sort of man! I know I've been horrid, and I've done lots of wrong things, and I behaved dreadfully with Arthur! (Oh! not what Vera told you, of course, though even that was more his doing than mine!) But in spite of it all, I thought that you were my friend, that you respected me—that I could trust you! Please go before I say what I shall be sorry for—I will not think of this again. I will only remember that you were kinder to me once!"

"Look here, Daphne," Reggie interrupted her, "I haven't finished; perhaps you will think this worse cheek than all the rest. But I can't help it; it's better for you to know the truth than what you are thinking now. I came here because I love you, because I have always loved you. Long before you got engaged to David, and all that rot. I didn't tell you before, partly because it wouldn't have been any use, and partly because I didn't want to marry you the—the way I thought you *were*, you know. I think a woman owes it to her husband not to be a flirt; that was why I jawed you so about it, d'you remember?"

"Y—es, I remember," said Daphne in a quieter voice.

"And, oh, you took it beautifully," he went on, "and I saw that you weren't really a flirt at all. You simply couldn't help it. It was just that you were so awfully fetching, you know. You don't mind my saying that, do you? because it's what I really think, and I was coming to see you at Overham, only I heard that you would be at Lady Middleton's and then—— Oh, Daphne, I haven't hurt you, have I?" He moved towards her, but she only shook her head. "I say—Daphne," he exclaimed in amazement, "you—you don't care, do you?"

"Of course not," said Daphne; "why should I? Please go away, Reggie, you've hurt me horribly. I—I don't know how much you haven't hurt me! And you can't possibly want to marry a woman who has been engaged twice—and encouraged other men, and been a horrid little flirt. You said I was a horrid little flirt yourself!"

"Oh! I didn't, Daphne," he implored, "honour bright!"

"And even if you do want to marry me, how—how do you know that I care for you?" Daphne finished with a rush.

"I don't," said Reggie, "but I'm here to find out."

"Then all I can say is," said Daphne, with great asperity, "that if you don't know by now, I don't think you ever *will* find out—and I had better tell you——" Reggie was quite close to her now; he took both her hands.

"Look here!" he said, "what are you marrying me for?" Daphne met his eyes bravely, but her lips trembled a little.

"Because I love you," she said, "and for no other reason whatever." He bent his head and kissed her hands very gently and tenderly. "Reggie," she whispered, "I—I loved Arthur, too."

"Then he was a very lucky fellow," said Reggie; "but I'm glad he's dead," he added to himself, as Lilian opened the door.

"My dear people," said Lilian, "why on earth haven't you rung for light?"

"Oh! I thought we—had," said Daphne. Lilian looked at them and smiled.

"I really think," said Mrs. Fordington, "that you might have remembered about that penny reading-book, Daphne; now I shall have to send for it and pay the postage. Still, of course, I am very glad to hear that you are going to make a great marriage. I hope Lord Cheston is a good young man, as well as a peer."

"I hope so, too," said Daphne, as her aunt left the room. Then she turned to her uncle. "I am trusting to my feelings," she said with a little smile. "Tell me, is it right?" Her uncle looked at her for a moment or two before he answered:

"I am inclined to think it is the best thing in the world," he said at last. "And 'every good and every perfect gift cometh from above'; you are awake now, I think, Daphne, so you will remember that!"

"And understand?" said Daphne very softly.

"And understand," said her uncle. There came a silence between them, and then her uncle, with his eyes turned, to a little picture of Dora, spoke again. "You must let love go the whole way," he said, "not stop at Death, which is only one of the Station Houses of the Soul. Be very sure that whatever comes to you of darkness or pain, nothing, either from above or below, can take from you the knowledge that 'The same goal is still on the same track.'"

"And that is immortality?" said Daphne. Her uncle did not answer her in words; he looked out of the window over the autumn fields, now fast losing their last touch of summer life. Then he smiled back at her.

"We shall have the everlasting spring," he said.

THE END.

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